

Russia's approaches to military interventions

A comparative case study of Georgia and Syria

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Abstract

This thesis compares the justifications by the Russian authorities on their stance on military intervention in the cases of Georgia and Syria. The justifications are examined through an idea analysis, using ideal types based on the *solidarist* and *pluralist* versions of international society of the English School Theory (EST). The two branches disagree to the extent values and norms can be shared by members of international society, and therefore represent opposing positions on the legitimacy of military interventions to prevent gross violations of human rights.

A comparative analysis of the two cases reveals both contradictions and similarities. In Syria, Russian authorities held pluralist principles such as state sovereignty and non-intervention over the moral obligation to intervene in order to prevent gross human rights violations. In Georgia, however, they were willing to defend solidarist ideas to justify the intervention. The analysis suggests that these ideas were primarily defended as a result of the perceived duty to protect civilians or Russian citizens close to Russian borders, and less so to protect civilians in other parts of the world. This contradiction may not be as inconsistent as usually held, however, if solidarist ideas are used consistently to justify the need to protect Russian citizens or perceived Russian interests close to its border. Both cases show that Russian authorities are skeptical to the expansion of solidarist norms based on Western values, as this development is perceived to disrupt international order and to increase Western hegemony in the system, which negatively affects the great power status Russia seeks to attain in the post-Cold War era.

The implications of Russia's approach to military intervention are that the Russian authorities are likely to remain skeptical to its endorsement, especially on Western terms, and that the UN Security Council is likely to continue having difficulties in dealing with threats to international peace and security. However, in the post-Soviet sphere, Russia's perceived duty to protect Russian citizens could spark similar interventions as the one in Georgia.

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Any mistake or error in this thesis is the author's responsibility alone.

Mads Møll Austgulen,

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1 Introduction

In response to the crisis in Syria, Russia has refused to side with the terms of Western permanent members of the UN Security Council. The Russian government has opposed any policy aimed at dictating the political process in Syria, especially those policies that could result in a military intervention or regime change. As a permanent member with veto-power in the UN Security Council, Russia has effectively (to date) prevented the endorsement of an intervention in Syria, despite the calls to do so by US President Barack Obama and other Western leaders (Charap 2013: 39). Russia, together with China, has vetoed three UN resolutions directed at Syria, and has deflected any pressure on the Syrian government (Trenin 2013: 3). As a result, the international community has become unable to act collectively and to find a solution that could prevent further escalation of the conflict. The Syrian crisis has illustrated a fundamental divergence between Russia's approach to military intervention and that of the rest of the international community, especially the US and the EU (Charap 2013: 36).

However, in 2008 Russia intervened by force in Georgia in response to a Georgian attack on Russian peacekeeping troops deployed in the Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This was the first military attack on a foreign state carried out by Russia since the end of the Cold War. Russia's intervention seriously threatened to overthrow the Georgian government (Antonenko 2007: 23), and posed a serious challenge to established rules of international order (Allison 2008: 1148). The Russian operations were executed without authorization from the UN Security Council, and were quickly condemned by Western governments after their initiation. The conflict was not seen as a minor war on the periphery of Europe, but as a major security challenge for the West (Bowker 2011: 197).

This thesis is concerned with the justifications used by the Russian authorities in their stance on military intervention in Georgia and Syria, rather than with the material interests that drive Russia's approach to military interventions. In the next

section I explain the why this focus is chosen in the thesis, before I present a two-folded research question.

1.1 Background for the thesis

One characteristic of international politics in the post-Cold War era has been an increased focus on human rights (Brown 2008: 508-511). When human rights are violated in states, the members of the UN Security Council continuously engage in debates whether to intervene in order to prevent further bloodshed. The use of force to prevent gross human rights violations in other states is highly controversial because it violates fundamental norms and principles in international relations protecting states from interference by other states, such as the principles of state sovereignty and non-intervention. The debate about military intervention therefore relates to fundamental and contested principles and norms in international relations. Whether states should or should not violate the principle of state sovereignty in order to prevent gross violations of human rights has been extensively debated in the influential English School Theory (EST) approach to international relations. This theory holds that there is a “society of states” at work in international relations that share certain interests and values despite the existence of international anarchy. Within the EST, the *solidarists* and the *pluralists* disagree about the degree to which the international society of states can agree to common values and interests. The disagreement about the legitimacy of military intervention is a fundamental aspect of this debate, and has been one of the most prominent aspects of the EST (Bellamy 2003: 321).

The solidarists embrace the possibility of shared moral and norms held in international society, and consider the possibility of cooperation towards substantive common goals to be more far-reaching. States can agree to certain acceptable “standards of civilization” held in the international society (Buzan 1991: 478). Solidarists claim that since states share basic norms regarding human rights, these norms impose limitations on how states can treat their peoples. Solidarists thus consider compromising state sovereignty by means of military intervention legitimate “in the name of universal standards of legitimate state conduct” (Reus-Smit 2001:

519). In instances of human rights violations, the international society has a moral responsibility to intervene to secure peace and stability.

The pluralists, on the other hand, regard common values and norms held in the international society to be minimal. States can only agree to certain ground rules, centered on shared concerns about international order under anarchy, which largely limit themselves within the confines of reciprocal recognition of sovereignty, diplomacy, and the norm of non-intervention (Buzan 1991: 478). In other words, solidarists are most concerned with justice, while pluralists are most concerned with order. As a result, the two understandings of international society present opposing views on the legitimacy of military intervention.

In times of major international crisis and conflict, the debates between states about whether or not to use force against sovereign states reveal different approaches by major powers in the international society. The debate between solidarists and pluralists is therefore not only theoretical, but also highly practical. Particularly in times of major security and humanitarian crises, different actors play different roles and promote different values and norms. The debate about military intervention is one such situation where normative differences become apparent. As Wheeler (1992: 463) argues, military intervention “poses the conflict between order and justice in international relations in its starkest form”.

In the framework of the EST, Browning (2008: 12) argues that within Western states attempts to push international society in a solidarist direction are “clear and (...) evident in the arguments in favour of humanitarian intervention and the international community’s ‘responsibility to protect’ in the case of gross violations of human rights”. Using the international society approach of the English School to international relations, some scholars have examined how Russia relates to the institutions, values and norms held in international society in the post-Cold War era (Browning 2008, Aalto 2007, Allison 2013, McFarlane 2006). Scholars have disagreed to what extent Russia, as an emerging power, is seeking to achieve greater alignment with Western states over shared norms and values (McFarlane 2006, Aalto 2007, Browning 2008,

Allison 2013). Some have concluded that Russia can be located at the very boundary of this international society, and that it is “busy trying to adapt to global institutions” (Buzan 2004: 238). Others have argued that Russia defends the pluralist version of international society. Such claims are based on Russia’s support of a strict and traditional understanding of state sovereignty and critique of the emerging norm of humanitarian intervention promoted by Western states in the post-Cold War era (Charap 2013: 7, McFarlane 2002: 58, Browning 2008: 12). These scholars argue that Russia seeks to emerge as a great power in global affairs, and aims at challenging the norms held in international society. From this perspective, Russia is not seeking alignment with Western humanitarian norms and values. Western-led military interventions in the post-Cold War era have illustrated the relevance of this perspective, as several of these have been executed without the support of the Russian authorities, thereby lacking a UN Security Council authorization. Most notably are the interventions in Kosovo in 1999 by NATO and in Iraq in 2003 by the US (McFarlane 2006: 45), which Russia opposed, fearing that such unilateral action by Western states could destabilize world order amongst states. Undoubtedly, the practice of humanitarian intervention continues to increase the tension between Russia and Western states.

Yet, Russia has been seeking strategic partnerships with the EU and the US, leading to some degree of convergence of shared interests and goals. This has led Browning (2008) and Aalto (2007) to conclude that there are prospects for developing more solidarist elements for Russia in some areas, as seen by proposals to integrate Russia further into “the broader EU international society through the project to build four ‘common spaces’ in the realms of economics, internal security, external security and education and culture” (Browning 2008: 16). In addition, Russia has arguably shown some signs of adapting to emerging norms regarding the legitimacy of humanitarian protection. The resolution in the UN Security Council that led to the intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 was not vetoed. Russia joined the US in its War on Terror after 9/11, which clearly challenges rigid interpretations of state sovereignty and international order. In 2005, Russia supported the implementation of the

Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine by the UN¹, which increased the focus on humanitarianism at the expense of a strict interpretation of state sovereignty. The R2P was used as one of the main arguments in the resolution that sparked the intervention in Libya in 2011, and was not vetoed by Russia. Finally, Russia intervened for ostensibly humanitarian purposes in the sovereign state of Georgia in 2008.

Admittedly, Russian authorities have later expressed concerns that the R2P could establish “precedents for future action that might infringe on states’ domestic jurisdiction” (Welsh 2012: 294). This poses the question of how Russian authorities relate to the humanitarian doctrine emerging the post-Cold War era, and how Russia can be understood in the international society approach to international relations.

1.1.1 Research questions

The aim of this thesis is to examine and compare how Russian authorities justified their stance on military intervention in the cases of intervention in Georgia and non-intervention in Syria and what this implies for Russia’s role in international society. The first aim of this thesis is to answer the following research question:

How was the seemingly contradictory stance on military interventions in the cases of Georgia and Syria justified by the Russian authorities, and which ideas of international society were presented in the justifications?

By using a comparative case study to compare the justifications in two cases, I aim to examine similarities and differences in how the Russian authorities justified their stance. The two cases selected for this study seem to reveal a contradictory stance by Russia on military intervention. By using the theoretical framework of the EST and its conception of international society, I explore the extent to which solidarist and

¹ “Each state has a responsibility to protect its citizens from large-scale ethnic cleansing, mass killings, and other conscience-shocking suffering. If that state, however, is unable or unwilling to exercise that responsibility, or actually is the perpetrator of mass atrocities, its sovereignty is abrogated while the responsibility to protect devolves to the international community of states, ideally acting through the UN Security Council” (Weiss 2010: 356).

pluralist ideas were expressed by the Russian leadership in these two cases. The method I intend to apply is explained in detail in chapter 2.

The second aim of the thesis is to consider the implications of Russia's justifications in the two cases. Thus, the second research question is as follows:

What do the justifications of Russia's stance on military intervention in Georgia and Syria imply for Russia's role in international society?

The results from the comparison of the two cases will give insights into the kind of principles and norms Russia is defending and promoting in international society. The Georgian case may suggest that Russia to a certain extent has adapted to solidarist views of international society promoted by Western states. It could imply that Russia's approach to military interventions is not as persistent as usually thought, or that the Russian authorities perceive military intervention legitimate under certain conditions. This, in turn, could imply that Russia is willing to integrate further into international society of shared norms with Western states. On the other hand, as Allison (2013) has argued, it could mean that Russian authorities are simply "misusing" emerging norms enabling military intervention to justify an exceptional use of force, and that such justifications are cynically and instrumentally applied in order to pursue their own interests. According to this perspective, Russian authorities aim at undermining emerging solidarist norms and resist deeper normative integration into the international society of shared norms with Western states, particularly when it comes to military intervention. As an emerging power, and because of Russia's permanent membership in the UN Security Council, Russia does have the influence to shape such norms. Russia's ability to shape the emerging practice of humanitarian intervention in international relations must therefore be considered.

However, some scholars have argued that Russian authorities' use of humanitarian claims is not simply an abuse of the humanitarian doctrine in the pursuit of geopolitical goals. According to this perspective, the cynical misuse of

humanitarian claims by Russia “provides only a trivial explanation and thus ignores the origins of the current controversy” (Kurowska 2014: 3). The point is that the perceptions held by Russian authorities must be interpreted in their particular setting in order to understand why they purposefully engage in the promotion of certain ideas.

This thesis aims at contributing to the literature on Russia’s integration into the international society, a state that according to Aalto (2007: 460) has “been widely neglected in the otherwise vibrant literature on international society”, by focusing on its approach to military interventions. In addition, the thesis also aims to consider how valuable the international society approach is in explaining Russia’s approaches on military intervention. When it comes to Russia’s approach to particular military interventions, a large part of previous research has focused on Russia’s material interests rather than their justifications (Trenin 2013, Charap 2013). This is also the case in the literature on Russia’s position on intervention in Georgia and Syria. This thesis therefore has an original perspective in the study of Russian approaches to military intervention.

Before I proceed, the two concepts of *military intervention* and *state sovereignty* need more thorough clarification.

1.2 Terms and concepts

1.2.1 Military intervention

In this thesis, intervention is understood as an

activity undertaken by a state, a group within a state, a group of states or an international organization which interferes coercively in the domestic affairs of another state. It is a discrete event, having a beginning and an end, and it is aimed at the authority structure of the target state. It is not necessarily lawful or unlawful, but it does break a conventional pattern of international relations (Vincent 1974: 13).

Such activity aiming at influencing the internal politics of a foreign state may consist of economic, political, moral and military means. From a legal point of view, the intervention is neither requested nor approved by state authorities. This thesis focuses on military means. *Military intervention* is first and foremost a political action with the use of military means. Central to the phenomenon of intervention is an effort to change or preserve the structure of power and authority within a foreign state (McFarlane 2002: 13). The political aim of an intervention is to affect the course and outcome of internal conflicts by “the direct and coercive application of military force” (McFarlane 2002: 14). Some scholars have also pointed at the difficulty of making a clear distinction between *war* (military conflict between states) and *intervention* (coercive military interference in the internal affairs of another state) (McFarlane 2002: 15, Finnemore 2003: 8-9), and therefore I do not differentiate between them in this thesis.

Since the interventions during the 1990s, and especially after the establishment of the R2P doctrine of 2005, the boundary between military intervention and humanitarian intervention has become blurred. In this study I include the definition of *humanitarian intervention* as one type of military intervention, in which the objective is to protect the lives and welfare of foreign citizens rather than primarily to alter political balances. The intervener nevertheless uses coercive military force to fulfill his objectives. Intervention for self-interested material goals or for changing domestic political structures may not be the first priority, and is often replaced by ethical and human-oriented principles in the discourse supporting such interventions. However, in most cases it is difficult to argue that political and material aims are entirely absent when states intervene even though states argue in terms of protecting lives (Allison 2013: 2-3, McFarlane 2002: 14-15). Often intervening states have at least some considerations of *realpolitik*, that is, politics based on power or practical and material factors and considerations, rather than moral, ethical or ideological premises (Pearson et al. 1994: 206). It is also possible that the willingness to intervene on humanitarian grounds reflect the judgment that political change is necessary for humanitarian reasons (McFarlane 2002: 15). In other words, humanitarian interventions often alter

the political arrangements as a result of military operations, even though such outcomes are not articulated by the intervener.

1.2.2 State sovereignty

State sovereignty has been a defining principle of interstate relations and a foundation of world order for the past several hundred years (ICISS 2001: 5). It is widely held that it constitutes the *grundnorm* in the international society (Reus-Smit 2001: 519). It remains at the heart of “both customary international law and the UN Charter” (ICISS 2001:5). Sovereignty gives states the exclusive authority within its borders and over the population living there, and is generally “associated with the state’s monopoly on the legitimate use of force within its territory” (McFarlane 2002: 5). This strict understanding of state sovereignty, referred to as Westphalian sovereignty, is according to Krasner (2009: 193) based on two core principles: territoriality and the exclusion of external actors from domestic authority structures. In other words, it is a system of political authority based on territory and autonomy. Westphalian sovereignty is thus violated if external actors influence or determine domestic authority structures (Ibid.). In the absence of sovereignty, the world of independent states simply would not exist because borders would have no meaning (Reus-Smit 2008: 280). Sovereignty imposes the duty of *non-intervention* on all states, a condition that ensures their necessary existence (Finnemore 2003: 7). A state’s exclusive authority over its territory is recognized by other states, since all states are legally equal members of the international society that lacks a supreme authority (McFarlane 2002: 15-16). Thus, military intervention fundamentally challenges the international system of sovereign equality.

However, the concept has “never been as inviolable, either in law or in practice, as a formal legal definition might imply” (ICISS 2001: 5). The sovereign state is therefore not “a once-and-for-all creation of norms that somehow exist apart from practice”, but is contested through “an ongoing accomplishment of practice” in the international society (Wendt 1992: 413). State sovereignty has therefore been and continues to be violated as a result of developments in contemporary international

relations. Alone, the concept of sovereignty is merely an empty shell in international relations. According to Christian Reus-Smit (2001: 520) state sovereignty has never been a self-referential value; “it has always been justified with reference to particular conceptions of legitimate statehood and rightful state action”. Also, as Robert Jackson (1990: 6) observes, the rule of non-intervention is “far more constraining for powerful states and far more liberating for weak states (...) since states are profoundly unequal in power”. When the sovereignty of other states is violated, states justify it by referring to particular conceptions of legitimate statehood and rightful state action. Such conceptions may differ from case to case and over time. State leaders have consistently justified intervention in some instances and opposed it in others.

Since state sovereignty is a contested concept shaped by ongoing developments, states can have different interpretations of it, and it exists as an institution only as a result of the development of certain intersubjective understandings and expectations amongst states (Wendt 1992: 412). Since the concept is not treated as a constant here, as realist theory takes it, but as constantly evolving, its understanding is shaped by historical and cultural experiences of states. State sovereignty is thus understood through constructivist lenses. Russia is usually understood as defending and promoting the Westphalian model of state sovereignty, dating back to the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648, which was shaped by agreements concluded by European states after the Thirty Years War (ICISS 2001: 6, McFarlane 2006: 56). Its basic elements are codified in the UN Charter, which was adopted in 1945. In accordance with Article 2 (1) the world is organized on the principle of sovereign equality of all member states. Article 2 (4) declares that “all member states shall refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state (...)”, while Article 2 (7) states that “nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters that are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any State or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter” (UN Charter, ICISS 2001: 7). In this sense, Russia cherishes the foundational principles offered by the UN Charter system.

However, there are limits to state sovereignty stated in the UN Charter. Firstly, Article 51 gives states the right of “individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations” (UN Charter). Any force used, however, must be “necessary and proportionate”. Secondly, force may be used if the UN Security Council authorizes it, in response to threats to international peace and security, as stated in Chapter VII (Ibid.). Wheeler (1992: 471) argues that Article 56 gives room for another exception, which declares that all members pledge themselves to take joint or separate action to set forth the purposes in Article 55, which states the legal and moral duty to overturn the non-intervention prohibition when gross human rights violations of the UN Charter take place. This supports the view that the prevention of gross human rights abuses is as important to the UN Charter as is promoting peace and security. However, it challenges the Westphalian model since an external actor exercises authority within the territory of a state, and certainly if the “external actor alters conceptions of legitimate action that are held by groups within a given polity” (Krasner 2009: 116). How the Russian leadership relates to these different understandings of state sovereignty is an essential part of the analysis.

1.3 The time frame of the study

The time period of the investigated justifications presented by the Russian leadership is limited in both cases. The cases are centered on the periods of the most intensive discussion on these issues by the Russian government, since the justifications of Russia’s position were continuously presented and defended by the Russian authorities within those time frames. The Georgian case is examined in the timeframe from the initiation of the military campaign on 8 August 2008 to the end of August when the recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia was declared by Russia.

In the Syrian case, the Russian leadership quickly engaged in the debate, especially from August 2011, when US President Barack Obama explicitly proclaimed that “the time has come for President al-Assad to step aside” (Charap 2013: 37). This was supported by several Western states, which made the possibility of a military

intervention real. From 4 October 2011 to 19 July 2012 Russia, together with China, three times vetoed UN Security Council resolutions. In connection with these vetoes, Russian leaders vigorously argued for their position. Statements were also made in the aftermath of the third veto. Therefore, the Syrian case is examined with a special focus on the period between August 2011 through the end of 2012. The Syrian case has a longer time frame than the Georgian case, which I have chosen in order to include relevant statements presented by the Russian authorities.

1.4 The outline of the thesis

In the following **chapter 2** I present the methodological framework I intend to use in order to answer the first research question. This entails a description of the idea analysis that is used to analyze the justifications, a description of the data collection and a discussion of the challenges of the research design. In **chapter 3** I present the theoretical framework, which relies on the international society approach to international relations of the EST. Next, I introduce the debate within the EST about the legitimacy of military intervention between the pluralist and solidarist positions. I then proceed to consider how international society, focusing on military intervention, has evolved in the post-Cold War era, and next, how Russia can be understood within this framework. I end the chapter by constructing two ideal types based on the solidarist and pluralist positions which are used to analyze the Russian justifications. **Chapter 4** is divided into two parts: in the first part, I present a brief background of the conflicts in Georgia and Syria, before I examine how the Russian leadership justified their stance in the two cases, and the extent to which the two constructed ideal types were expressed; in the second part I compare and discuss the results of the two cases. At the end, the findings are summarized and discussed, and methodological and theoretical framework used in the analysis is critically considered. In **chapter 5** I briefly discuss the implications of the results, and consider Russia's place in international society. This includes an evaluation of Russia's approach to future interventions, and builds on insights from the current intervention in Ukraine.

2 Methodological framework

The starting point of this study is that state leaders defend and promote different versions of international society when justifying their stance on military intervention. These ideas are therefore possible to uncover in the justifications presented by the Russian authorities in the Georgian and Syrian cases. In the following chapter, I present the methodological framework used to analyze the justifications. This includes a presentation of the idea analysis using ideal types, an assessment of the data collection, and an elaboration of the methodological challenges of this methodological framework.

2.1 Comparative case study

A case study is the analysis of few cases, and is referred to as a small-*n* study. Each case represents one point or situation in time, and the goal is to compare similarities and differences between them. Comparing the two cases gives the advantage of gaining deep knowledge about the cases, and in addition provides a basis for comparison, an advantage that would be lost if only one case is studied. This is what constitutes a comparative case study (Gerring 2007: 27, Andersen 1997: 94). According to Bryman (2008: 58), we can “understand social phenomena better when they are compared in relation to two or more meaningfully contrasting cases or situations”. The case study allows me to study the two cases in depth and to gain comprehensive and deep knowledge of the ideas behind the justifications for Russia’s stance on military intervention in Georgia and Syria (George and Bennett 2005: 31). Studying the justifications presented in every intervention Russia has engaged in, is beyond the scope of this thesis, and there is the possibility that this would lead to a superficial analysis since a thorough investigation of these arguments would require much more than this study allows for. The case study also gives the possibility to offer a work of exploratory/disconfirmatory nature (Gerring 2007: 40). In other words, it allows me to examine and compare the justifications in the Georgian and Syrian case, and to analyze whether they reveal contradictions or similarities.

This comparative case study uses a qualitative method, and has inherent strengths and weaknesses as compared to quantitative research. Questions of strengths and weaknesses tied to case studies are especially tied to validity. The strength of case studies is its *internal validity* because of its ability to dive deeper into the material and to obtain a more extensive understanding of the context in which an event or phenomenon takes place. Internal validity refers to the ability to establish the accuracy of a causal relationship. The aim of establishing strong internal validity in this thesis is related to the degree to which the ideas uncovered in the justifications of the Russian authorities provide a meaningful explanation for their approach to military intervention in Georgia and Syria. In doing so, the aim must be to provide high *measurement validity*, that is, the extent to which the ideals are measured accurately. This will be considered in subsection 3.4, where I construct the ideal types used to hold the Russian justifications up against.

Generally, a case study's weakness is held to be tied to *external validity*, that is, the extent to which the results can be generalized to a larger population. By definition, small-*n* studies offer problems of representativeness compared to studies with a larger set of cases since they only include a small number of cases of a general phenomenon (Gerring 2007: 43). Because small *n*-studies focus on few cases, many have criticized them for being inherently susceptible to bias and for lacking the ability to apply the findings produced to other cases (Ibid., George and Bennett 2005: 19-20). In this study, it would imply that the results of the analysis are limited when studying other cases where Russia has been involved in the debates over the use of force against other states. However, several scholars have argued against the pessimistic outlook for making generalizations in qualitative research. According to Gobo (2004: 422), the "logical mistake is confusing the representativeness of the case with the representativeness of its characteristics observed" by the researcher. Ultimately, the aim of qualitative research is to produce information that can be applied outside the study setting and to shed light on a larger class of cases (Gerring 2007: 20, Gobo 2004: 405-406). Deep examination of few cases can give insights into political processes and

actors, as well as their intentions. The results from the analysis can therefore give “contingent generalizations”, using the phrase of George and Bennett (2005: 31).

According to Shenton (2004: 71), researchers in qualitative case studies must determine how far they can be confident in transferring the results and conclusions from few cases to other situations. In addition, one must provide sufficiently thick description of the phenomenon under investigation to allow the reader to have a proper understanding of it, “thereby enabling them to compare the instances of the phenomenon described in the research report with those that they have seen emerge in other situations”. Malterud (2001: 483) argues that qualitative researchers should have ambitions of transferability beyond the study setting, but that findings and interpretations should be questioned and not taken for granted, and the effect of context and bias should be considered. In other words, the findings from a qualitative study must not be thought of as “facts that are applicable to the population at large, but rather as descriptions, notions, or theories applicable within a specified setting” (Malterud 2001: 486). Ruddin (2006: 805) therefore argues that instead of considering if the findings from case studies have external validity, one should use the more fitting term *strength of generalizability*, since it “suggests that generalization is a judgment of degree, rather than a binary decision”.

With this in mind, the results from this study should be considered in terms of how far they can be applied beyond the study setting. As the analysis provides the opportunity to gain better understanding of the ideas behind the arguments the Russian authorities present, such results may reveal mechanisms that have relevance in other cases where Russian authorities have engaged or will engage themselves in debates over military interventions.

The two cases are selected based on the observation that they seemingly represent a contradictory stance by Russian authorities on military intervention. However, the nature of the cases may be one of the reasons for this contradiction. As Georgia is located in the post-Soviet sphere, Russian authorities may have another approach to the use of force there compared to in Syria or elsewhere. Such results may

contain biases, and must be questioned and considered when giving contingent generalizations.

2.2 Idea analysis

As argued by Finnemore and Skikkink (2001: 396), “there is no single constructivist method or research design”, and one must use the available tools that are best suited to answer the research question. Because arguments used to justify their stance on military interventions refer to ideas² of how states and the international community should operate in the international system, I intend to apply the method of idea analysis. The theoretical foundation of this method is constructivism because it focuses on the role of ideas, norms, and political arguments, and stresses the role of collectively held ideas and understandings of social life. According to Berström and Boréus (2005: 177) there is no given blueprint explaining how to study ideas. One way is to construct *ideal types*, which is done in this thesis. An ideal type is a form of hypothetical construct, that is, a theoretical simplification of reality highlighting certain aspects of a social phenomenon at the expense of other aspects (Berström and Boréus 2005: 159).

The idea analysis aims at studying political ideas expressed by political actors close-up within a certain context, and rests on the assumption that ideas can be traced in text³ in a purposive way, and that ideas shape political behavior. The reason for using this method is that the Russian authorities, like other states, justify their stance on military intervention by referring to the principles and norms held in international relations. Essentially, they evaluate how their actions conform to contrasting norms in the international society, that is, the collective understanding of appropriate and inappropriate state conduct (Norris 2013: 1266). As Finnemore (2003: 15) observes, the justification is “analytically important because it speaks directly to, and therefore reveals something about, normative context and shared social purpose”. The

² Berström and Boréus (2005: 149) describe an idea as an understanding of reality; an evaluation of actions or how one should act.

³ By *text*, I mean speeches, statements, interviews and written documents.

expression of justifications by the political leadership is therefore important to focus on because it reveals “a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 1).

The ideal types used to analyze the Russian justifications are based on the solidarist and pluralist understandings of international society in the EST framework. The construction of the ideal types in this study is presented in subsection 3.3.

2.2.1 Sources

Given the assumption that ideas can be traced in a meaningful way in text, relevant data must be collected. The analysis in this paper is based on both primary and secondary sources. Justifications are most clearly present in the discourse of state leaders, senior diplomats and leading politicians. The collection of primary sources consists of statements and interviews made by key actors who represent Russia’s foreign policy, such as Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Prime Minister and later President (from May 2012) Vladimir Putin, President and later Prime Minister (from May 2012) Dmitry Medvedev, Russia’s Permanent Representative at the UN, Vitaly Churkin, and other high ranking officials, such as UN Deputy Ambassador Alexandr Pankin and Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov. Statements, speeches, interviews and written documents have been presented in the UN Security Council and other forums and media outlets, both international and Russian. In relation to the Syrian crisis, Russian authorities were active in the UN Security Council defending their approach to military intervention, but they also promoted their view in other forums. During the intervention in Georgia, most statements were made outside the UN Security Council forum. This was due to the swiftness and the sudden decision to intervene, and because the intervention was not preceded by debate in the UN Security Council. Statements were made both during the five-day military operations and during the following month in order to justify Russia’s actions. Russian leaders also sought to defend and justify their actions due to heavy criticism from the international community. These speeches, statements and interviews are included in the data material in this thesis.

A key part of the analysis is based on Russian primary sources. Most of the primary sources, which are in Russian, are collected and subsequently analyzed by using the ideal types. Since the translations into English are my own, the Russian quotes are presented in the footnotes in order to provide the reader with the opportunity to verify the translations and the validity of the arguments and to increase transparency.

The collection of primary data does not aim at being exhaustive, but is strategic in the sense that the collection of data is based on their relevance for the thesis. The goal is therefore to collect, analyze and interpret text that I find useful for this particular study. Other primary sources include key policy documents, such as The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation of 2013 and the Military Doctrine of 2010.

The secondary sources consist of academic literature, including books and scientific journal articles, reports and news articles. They represent both Western and Russian views in order to provide the analysis with the broadest possible foundation for a balanced evaluation.

2.2.2 Methodological challenges

As with all methods, the idea analysis has inherent advantages and challenges. The idea analysis can be regarded as a middle way between the content analysis and the discourse analysis. It separates itself from the content analysis in two ways: first, it uses a qualitative method instead of quantitative, and second, it interprets, rather than counts, ideas. In addition, it is less structurally confined than the discourse analysis since it recognizes that various political actors have room to maneuver within their “belief system” (Bratberg 2014: 80-81). Mapping the ideas presented in text may be the first step of an idea analysis. Subsequently, the aim is often to explain political behavior or decisions (Bratberg 2014: 60-61). This also opens up the possibility of analyzing not only what is being expressed in text, but also the meaning of expressions. In this thesis, the purpose is ultimately to be able to say something about

the ideas that shape Russia's approaches to military intervention. Interpretation, however, involves some challenges. As Berström and Boréus (2005: 172) explain, this may lead to the danger of either "forcing" text into the model, or of "stretching" the meaning of text to adapt it to the ideal types. One may also be tempted to "overinterpret" the data on the basis of the ideal types. This entails attributing meaning to the material or text that is not present.

What is important to note, is that the process of creating ideal types is a way to *simplify* reality. Constructing ideal types is one purposive way of doing this, because it structures unprocessed and comprehensive data material. The purpose of creating ideal types is not to accurately depict the complex reality, but to establish ideals which reality can be held up against (Bratberg 2014: 67). This can make one run into the danger of creating overly loose ideal types, which will turn them into dimensions rather than ideal types. This will only generate a rough sorting of the material in loosely constructed categories. This may reduce the *reliability* of the study. Reliability means that "applying the same procedure in the same way will always produce the same measure" (King et al. 1994: 25). The opposite must also be avoided: creating overly narrow and specific ideal types, which may lead to forcing the ideal types onto the data (Berström and Boréus 2005: 172). However, as King et al. (1994: 42) note, the process of simplification is inevitable for all research. No description or explanation will ever come close to capturing the full reality of the real world. Simplifying is therefore "a crucial step to useful knowledge" (King et al. 1994: 43). When working with large data materials, Berström and Boréus (2005: 171) point out that the need to use analytic tools that are capable of systematizing and categorizing increases. If the ideal types are systematically and thoroughly constructed, they will provide a better basis for conducting a comparative analysis (Berström and Boréus 2005: 171-172). Another point regarding the ideal types, is that some ideas that prove to be present in text may not be fully captured by the ideal type scheme. This is not necessarily a weakness, but should be included in the conclusions (Bratberg 2014: 74).

Since the idea analysis is not only descriptive, but also interpretive, Bergström and Boréus (2005: 27) stress the importance of context when studying ideas, since the

interpretations of expressed ideas must be understood within certain frames. As Bratberg (2014: 57) observes, the idea analysis commonly strives to understand the underlying assumptions and convictions behind the expressed ideas. The researcher's knowledge of the context he or she is studying thus plays a vital role, and can reduce the risk of misinterpreting the ideas. This is also important as ideas are not the only factor shaping state behavior. To fully comprehend political behavior, the idea analysis is usually supplied with an assessment of the context within which the expression of ideas occurs (Bratberg 2014: 81). The knowledge I have about Russian politics and language is therefore considered an advantage in this thesis.

When working with primary sources, one should aim at increasing transparency by accounting for the data sources used. This increases reliability, and provides an opportunity for other researchers to see whether the same data support the conclusions of the study and make it possible for others to make their own evaluations of the inferences claimed from this information. The original statements in Russian are presented in the footnotes in an effort to increase transparency.

3 Theoretical framework

In this chapter I present and discuss the theoretical framework used in the thesis. First I introduce the international society approach to international relations and show how it differs from other dominant theoretical perspectives. I then proceed to elaborate on the constructivist interpretation of state interests used in this thesis. Next, I present the core assumptions of the EST and how it relates to military intervention, focusing on the solidarist and the pluralist understandings of international society. Next, I assess how international society has evolved in the post-Cold War context, before I demonstrate how Russia and its policies can be understood in this light. I end the chapter by operationalizing the two concepts of solidarism and pluralism, which are subsequently used to analyze the Russian justifications in the Georgian and Syrian cases in chapter 4.

3.1 The English School Theory

Originally, the EST sought to give a better explanation of how the world operates by combining the two dominating theories of international relations, namely realism and liberalism. The aim was to combine the co-operative nature of international relations with the realist conception of the conflictual nature of the international system (Murray 2013: 8). Like realism, the EST assumes that states exist in a condition of international anarchy. According to realists, there are three basic elements in the international system: anarchy (the absence of a central authority), a “self-help” structure (all states are self-reliant and must secure their own security as a result of the absence of a central or collective security structure), and the distribution of power (Wendt 1992: 392, Barnett 2006: 253). These characteristics reveal the vulnerability of states in the system, and as a result states must ensure their own survival and security by increasing their relative power. Since they view power and national interests as the most important factors of states’ behavior in international relations, they ignore the effects of norms, values, perceptions and identity in shaping and constraining state behavior (Barnett 2006: 252, Tsygankov 2010: 11). Realists

have therefore denied that the relations between states have any social content (Reus-Smit 2002: 478). For realists, international legal obligations are weak at best, because there are no enforcement mechanisms to prevent states, especially great powers, from pursuing their self-interests (Reus-Smit 2008: 289).

The essence of the EST is that states are not condemned to compete for power and security; instead, they form a society where they are able to reach agreement on how to cope with anarchy, thereby enabling them to create a high level of order in the international system (Linklater 2010: 2). The EST incorporates the realist assumptions of the primacy of states interacting in a system of international anarchy, but combines this with the notion that states are also constituted by normative structures. Wendt (1992: 395) has argued that “anarchy is what states make of it”, and that states therefore can form a society where they can agree to the common desire to limit the use of force. Because of their common interest in establishing and preserving international order, states recognize that their security and survival rests upon the willingness to control the use of force, to respect state sovereignty, the principle of non-intervention and treaties. The collectivity of states is, according to the EST, therefore best conceived as operating in an international society that accepts some common values, rules, institutions and practices (Armstrong 2008: 38-39, Murray 2013: 9). The EST is closely connected to constructivism since both approaches focus on the social dimension in order to explain state conduct. Before the core assumptions of the EST are presented, it is necessary to stipulate how the constructivist approach understands the relationship between ideas and state interests.

3.1.1 Ideas and interests

Military interventions are often claimed to be driven by the self-interest of states. From a realist or liberalist point of view, states are rational actors with given interests and identities, and are driven by the wish to increase their power and pursue self-interested goals. Thus, states “change behavior but not identities and interests” (Wendt 1992: 392). Constructivism does not dispute that states seek to strengthen their interests, but rejects that interests, as well as identities, are predefined and

materialistic. Rather, ideas matter, because the preferences and motivations of states are not a contextually given fact, but are “ideational, reflecting a normative (indeed, moral, ethical, and political) orientation toward the context in which they will have to be realized” (Hay 2011: 61). Conceptions of self-interests are cognitive filters that actors use to orient themselves toward their environment, “providing one (of several) means through which an actor evaluates the relative merits of contending political courses of action” (Hay 2011: 79). Therefore, factors like ideas, perceptions and norms⁴ not only enable and constrain the behavior of states, but also shape their identities and interests (Barnett 2008: 259). If interests are not given, then interests can be interpreted in the ideas presented by the actor, insofar as interests equal ideas in the form they are transformed into policy (Bratberg 2014: 77).

However, to what extent can expressed ideas be understood as the real interests of states? For instance, as McFarlane (2002: 11) observes, the justifications for military intervention may mask power-political or other self-centered motivations. They may be instrumentally applied, he argues, not necessarily meaning a commitment to the norms referred to. The point made by constructivists is that ideas cannot be disconnected from “real”/material interests, because ideas shape what states perceive to be their interests (Hay 2011: 79-81). States can have humanitarian concerns as well as interests in other issues like security or economy. Therefore, the point made in this thesis is not what the “real” interests of Russian authorities are in their approach to military intervention in Georgia and Syria, but rather *the ideas* that shape the interests of the Russian authorities in their approach. In other words, the assumption is that Russian perceptions about itself and the context in which it operates shape its interests, not the other way around. An example is how Russian *conceptions of interests* play a vital role in shaping the understanding of state sovereignty. As I argue in subsection 3.3, Russian interests and preferences with respect to military intervention cannot be properly understood without understanding Russia’s relation to Western powers.

⁴ Finnemore and Skikkink (1998: 891) define norms as “the standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity”.

3.1.2 Core assumptions of the EST

The classical work of Hedley Bull is considered to be the cornerstone of English School thinking. Bull sets out three fundamental spheres at play in international relations. Firstly, the EST identifies an *international system* similar to that of realist theory. The system is about power politics and the primacy of sovereign states. Secondly, as the social contact between the states increases, they form an *international society*, where states accept the rules of “co-existence”, governing how states should interact on issues such as the use of force (Totten 2012: 8-9, Dunne 2010: 148). According to Bull (1977: 13), a society of states exists when

a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with each other, and share in the workings of common institutions.

In other words, the international society is about the institutionalization of shared norms and identities among states, and is the main focus of the EST (Murray 2013: 8-9). In addition, Bull stipulated that international order only had a value as it was instrumental in bringing order to human society as a whole. Bull regarded it as an ultimate goal to expand international society into a society of mankind or world society, and increase the level of shared values (Totten 2012: 9). The EST therefore also focuses on a third aspect – a *world society*, which sees individuals and “the global population as a whole as the focus of global societal identities and arrangements” (Murray 2013: 9). This aspect runs parallel to international society, and refers to the shared interests and values “linking all parts of the human community” (Bull 1977: 279). At the center of the world society are human rights. Dunne (2010: 150) points out the emergence of humanitarian law as an indicator of an evolving world society.

This is where the solidarist and pluralist concepts become relevant. As the level of cooperation between states increases on issues such as human rights or economic

exchange, the more solidarist it becomes. The greater convergence of values, the “thicker” the content within the international society becomes. The international society therefore “thickens” and “gains greater alignment with the society of mankind when room for cooperation is greatest, such as in economic exchange or agreement on fundamental human rights” (Totten 2012: 8-9). Therefore, the level of solidarism can be driven by context or domains, like that of economic cooperation or approaches to humanitarian intervention (Totten 2012: 10).

The three spheres of system, society and world society are according to the EST always operating simultaneously, and are implemented by five institutions: the balance of power, international law, diplomacy, war and the “concert of great powers” (Murray 2013: 8). The first two aspects identified by Bull relate to a pluralist society. In this society, states conform to the shared principle of respecting each other’s sovereignty managed by the core international institutions. Order in the international society is a requirement for the expansion of greater levels of cooperation and shared goals within international society. The third aspect, the level of cooperation, opens up for more solidarist expansion (Totten 2012: 9-10, Dunne 2005b: 166-167). Pluralism and solidarism are therefore “contending positions on a spectrum that connects the international society, the international system and world society” (Totten 2012: 11). Thus, a world society must be separated from a solidarist international society. As Buzan (1991: 478) notes, a solidarist international society merely presupposes that “the potential scope for international society is somewhat wider, possibly embracing shared norms about such things as limitations on the use of force, and acceptable ‘standards of civilization’ with regard to the relationship between states and citizens (that is, human rights)”.

According to Linklater (2010: 11), the value of including these three aspects demonstrates the value of the EST, because it recognizes the “interplay between national self interest, international order and universal values”. Parrat (2013: 2) has expressed a similar point, arguing that the uniqueness of the EST approach is that it accepts that “cooperation, socialization and *realpolitik* all take place”, and “that it allows cynicism and optimism to coexist”. The possibility that states justify

intervention instrumentally because states are competing for power, is therefore included in the theoretical assumptions.

3.1.3 Critique

One of the main critiques against the EST is “the fact that the founding members of the English School were Western-trained scholars steeped in the Western intellectual tradition”, and that they failed to “devote much attention to how the expansion of international society had appeared to non-European communities” (Linklater 2010: 10). Consequentially, the EST has tended to portray other than Western powers in a state of “backwardness” compared to Western civilization, and has inescapably viewed developments in international relations as a linear process towards a global acceptance of Western liberal ideology (Kurowska 2014: 19). If this development is not shared by other than Western powers, the basic features of international society may come under strain if they “revolt” against dominating Western powers. The primary purpose of international society was to maintain the balance of power and was anti-hegemonial in character, and exists “to protect diverse political communities from being overrun by more powerful neighbors” (Dunne 2003: 306). The shared interests and values of international society are then likely to come under strain if some powers seek to “lay down the law to others” (Dunne 2003: 315). This point of critique against international society is further elaborated on in subsection 3.2.

Another area of critique against the EST is the absence of clearly defined boundaries. The EST has never determined precisely where the boundaries of the international society begin and end (Totten 2012: 9). Since the three aspects of system, society and world society are seen as a spectrum, ranging from a realist understanding “rooted in the relative material capabilities of states” to the fully “convergent international society where the components all broadly share the same values”, the boundaries between them can become somewhat blurry (Little 2009: 83). To clarify this abstraction, Totten (2012: 9-10) argues that one should specify and narrow down which context one is focusing on. This thesis deals with Russia’s approach to military

intervention, and the extent to which it accepts “thicker” versions of international society promoted by Western states. This is also more specifically outlined in the following subsections.

3.1.4 Military intervention in international society

The debate about intervention between the solidarists and pluralists is one of the most prominent aspects of the EST because it presents the conflict between order and justice in international society in its starkest form (Bellamy 2003: 321, Reus-Smit 2002: 490). Any armed military intervention to rescue individuals from genocide or massive suffering inside the borders of a foreign state, challenges the foundations of a society of states built on the principle of non-intervention and order. However, can it be justified in situations of extreme human suffering? (Wheeler 1992: 463).

Since pluralists claim that the normative content is quite “thin”, they dispute that the international society rests on a minimal level of cooperation between states. This means that pluralist international society is centered on shared concerns about international order under anarchy, which include the principle of reciprocal recognition of sovereignty, diplomacy, and the norm of non-intervention (Wheeler 1992: 467, Bellamy 2003: 323, Buzan 1991: 478). Pluralists insist that the international society “is founded on acceptance of a plurality of actors and the existence of a constitution as the best guarantor of the protection of the actor” (Bellamy 2003: 323). This permits each state to develop its own way of life. The pluralist view is skeptical about the amount of solidarity between states, and see states as “the principle bearers of rights and duties in international law, with individuals only having legal rights insofar as the states provide them” (Wheeler 1992: 467). Individuals are not subjects of international law because there is no agreement on universal principles of human rights and what constitutes a supreme humanitarian emergency (Ibid., Bellamy 2010: 3).

As pluralists see it, states are unable to agree about substantive issues such as social justice. States cannot reach a universal consensus on right and wrong conduct in

international relations because they deny the potential for moral action in a world of sovereign states (Reus-Smit 2002: 490). Rather, states are only able to agree on the basic rules and norms that order their mutual coexistence. As Jackson (2000: 178) points out, the pluralist international society is an arrangement “in which the domestic affairs of states are their own affair, which mean that statespeople and citizens are free to compose their own domestic values and orchestrate them in their own way”.

Pluralists claim that human rights have developed within a specific (Western) cultural context and are not universal. Therefore, “proposals for universal ethics or common standards of humane governance are always culturally biased” (Bellamy 2003: 324). What is more, attempts to deepen the normative content in the international society can, according to the pluralists, potentially cause conflict and destabilize international order. Therefore, humanitarian intervention is illegitimate and illegal because it offends against this fundamental norm of international society, and threatens international order (Bellamy 2010: 4, Bellamy 2003: 323). Defending the pluralist position, Jackson (2000: 291) argues that

the stability of international society, especially the unity of the great powers, is more important, indeed far more important than minority rights and humanitarian protections in Yugoslavia or any other country - if we have to choose between those two sets of values.

Solidarists, on the other hand, understand the content within the international society as quite “thick”, meaning that the level of solidarity between states over norms, rules, and institutions are well developed. The possibility of cooperation towards substantive common goals is therefore more far-reaching because of the shared norms held in the international society about such issues as the acceptable “standards of civilization”. They argue that the international society has developed a basic common understanding of justice and solidarity that is universal to all states with respect to law enforcement (Buzan 1991: 478). This consensus in the international society has developed over time, they claim, which implies that state practice has developed towards a growing recognition that there is a duty of collective humanitarian

intervention in extreme cases of human suffering. This makes the *individuals*, rather than the state, the legitimate subjects and the ultimate members of the international society, and gives them rights and duties in international law (Wheeler 1992: 468, Bellamy 2010: 4). Solidarists argue that intervention is one way of promoting world, as well as international, order because if sovereignty is violated in the process of saving human beings in suffering, it was because world order has precedence over international order (Linklater 2011: 9-10).

The solidarists hold that since there is a universal standard of morality, states agree to when the threshold for human suffering that should trigger humanitarian intervention, is reached. As Hedley Bull (1966: 64) has argued, solidarists claim that there is agreement in international society about what constitutes a supreme humanitarian emergency and legitimate act of intervention, and that this justifies an exception to the rule of non-intervention. When that threshold is reached, the states that comprise international society agree about the need to use force to uphold the moral purpose of the society.

3.2 International society in the post-Cold War era

According to Dunne (2005a: 81-82), “the members of international society generally accept that order has to be managed” by the UN, since the anarchical nature of international relations lacks a “world government” to control states. Despite the system of equal sovereignty, the five permanent members are nevertheless given the privilege of managing international peace and security. It is therefore up to the great powers and other institutions to ensure that the rights of the sovereign states are protected. Within the institutional setting of the UN it is appropriate to speak of the presence of an international society in international relations when considering the notion that “states conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in the their relations with each other, and share in the workings of common institutions”, according to the definition of Bull (1977: 13).

The possibilities of expanding international society towards world society were irrelevant before the end of the Cold War. Welsh (2011: 1196) argues that during the Cold War “the behaviour and rhetoric of UN member states (especially those on the Security Council) did not countenance humanitarian purposes as a legitimate basis for the use of force” due to the bipolarity of the international system during this period. The ideological and geopolitical considerations of the superpowers were specific to them and did not reflect normative consensus in the international community (McFarlane 2002: 49). The end of the ideological confrontations between the great powers after the Cold War led some to assume that the “end of history”⁵ had arrived; that the universalization of Western liberal democracy would be embraced by all states. This led to a stronger focus on human rights, and prospects for “thickening” international society became increasingly relevant after the end of the Cold War (Finnemore 2000: 4-5). The UN Security Council increasingly showed willingness to address the violations of international humanitarian law and to manage what is considered threats to international peace and security in an expanding range of areas, beginning with the UN mandated intervention in northern Iraq to protect Kurds in 1991 (Bellamy 2010: 4, Welsh 2011: 1197). Interventions were justified in accordance with two aspects of the UN Charter, which opened up for the possibility of military intervention on humanitarian grounds:

The strong human rights commitments articulated in the Preamble and Articles 1(2), 1(3) and 55; and the powers given to the Security Council in Articles 39–42 both to define what constitutes a threat to peace and security and to recommend action to counter such a threat (Welsh 2011: 1196).

The increased willingness to use force against sovereign states to prevent human suffering marked an important change in international relations because human suffering could constitute a threat to international peace and security, and therefore endorse a military intervention in violation of the Westphalian sovereignty (Bellamy

⁵ See Fukuyama, F. (1992) “The End of History and the Last Man”, New York: Free Press.

2003: 325). In the first decade following the end of the Cold War, several interventions were executed supposedly for humanitarian purposes: in Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda, Haiti, Kosovo, East Timor, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast and Liberia (Howard 2005: 23). Several conditions in the “new world order” inspired this development:

the heightened importance of human rights on the international political agenda; the incidence of "failed states" that create the conditions that give rise to calls for humanitarian intervention; expectations after the end of the Cold War that the UN would henceforth play a larger role in world politics; and, the "CNN effect" whereby, because of global media networks, we are more aware than ever before of human rights abuses in other lands (Ibid.).

There was a development in solidarist direction, illustrated by the situation when some NATO countries, even if they were reserved about the legitimacy of attacking Yugoslavia without a UN authorization, nevertheless supported NATO's unilateral intervention because of the perceived urgency of the humanitarian crisis that threatened the Albanians in Kosovo (Ibid.). For the solidarists, this gradual retreat from the more or less absolute conception of sovereignty in the post-Cold War era entailed an expansion of the level of agreement between states since the international community was given more authority to respond to what it perceived as threats to international peace and security (Bellamy 2003: 325). No longer could human right abusers hide behind the veil of sovereignty; instead, state authorities were increasingly understood as being responsible for protecting the safety and lives of their citizens. To a larger degree, state leaders accepted that the international society had both a legal right and a moral duty to intervene in situations of genocide and mass killing that offend against minimum standards of humanity (Wheeler and Bellamy 2005: 559). Especially within the West, there was a feeling that “something had to be done” in instances of violations against human rights, that such cases constituted a legitimate exception to the rule of non-intervention (Bellamy 2003: 325).

From the 1990s and beyond, the debate over the conditions in which force should be used for humanitarian purposes, became increasingly heated (McFarlane 2002: 58). The damaging division in the international community led Kofi Annan to urge member states to rethink their rights and responsibilities in a world where sovereign states were “widely understood to be at the service of their peoples, and not vice versa” and that the aim of the UN Charter had to be to “protect individual human beings, not to protect those who abuse them” (Annan 1999). Supporters of a solidarist approach followed Annan, accepting that states must have the responsibility to protect their populations, allowing the international community to intervene if states failed to exercise those responsibilities. That sovereignty could be understood as conditional and not as an absolute right illustrated an effort in the international society to socialize into accepting “thicker” solidarist approaches to military intervention. In 2005, the R2P doctrine was endorsed in the UN, despite the fact that Russia and China consistently voiced their skepticism to it, “endeavored to narrow its applicability, and thwarted attempts to refer to the international community’s responsibility to protect in Council resolutions” (Welsh 2011: 1198, 1200).

Howard (2005: 24) claims that the practice of humanitarian intervention has marginally shifted the balance “in favour of the rights of individuals over the rights of states”. There are several instances of human suffering that has led to UN authorized interventions. Most recently, in 2011 the UN endorsed an intervention in Libya. NATO forces that executed the intervention were later charged by several states, including Russia, for exceeding their civilian protection mandate (Thakur et al. 2013: 200).⁶ The fact that Russia and China did not veto this intervention indicated that there was some level of agreement between the major powers in the UN about the responsibility of the Libyan government to protect its own population. Despite the several cases of humanitarian interventions in the post-Cold War era, it was uncertain if the global community accepted that the emergence of the norm of military intervention to protect human rights took precedence over the established principles of

⁶ In Libya, NATO countries arguably exceeded their mandate when they executed the bombings. Resolution 1793 that facilitated the intervention was based on a no-fly-zone over Libya, not an expressed intent to intervene militarily. Russia did not veto against this resolution (McFarlane and Sabanadze 2013: 621).

state sovereignty and non-intervention. Several powers opposed the acceptance of more focus on human rights at the expense of state sovereignty and territorial integrity, and supported the pluralist position. To a large degree, the process of “thickening” international society has been promoted by Western states (Browning 2008: 17).

McFarlane and Sabanadze (2013: 610) argue that the challenges of the post-Cold War era have highlighted the “conceptual and practical tension between ‘the order cluster’ (sovereignty, non-intervention, and territorial integrity) and ‘the justice cluster’ (the rights of individuals and groups and self-determination)”. The supporters of pluralist principles argued that the practice of humanitarian intervention in the post-Cold War era were a threat to order, and that some states did not have the right to decide where and when human suffering was taking place (Bellamy 2003: 3-4). The NATO-led intervention in Kosovo in 1999 is often used as an illustration of this tension between pluralists and solidarists, as the operation was executed without a UN security Council mandate, and was thereby illegal according to international law (McFarlane 2002: 57). Supporters of a “thinner” international society rejected that some countries had the right to decide without consent to intervene in other states. The solidarists, on the other hand, insisted that the intervention fulfilled the ultimate objective of the international society to prevent extreme human suffering, and that it was legitimate (Ibid.).

To a large degree, the emerging norm of humanitarian intervention has, according to Browning (2008: 17), been based on a Western identity “premised on claims to universal knowledge about what constitutes good governance”. Suzuki (2008: 50-51) reiterates this point by observing that the development in the post-Cold War era and the increasing power of Western states, especially the US, has resulted in “a greater confidence for the society to ‘express a more cohesive vision of its purpose’ by promoting respect for human rights and liberal democratic governance as its core norms”. These duties reflect the international society’s domination by the West, he argues, and entail the “promotion of ‘good domestic governance’ towards ‘illiberal’ or ‘rouge’ states” (Suzuki 2008: 51). As a result, other great powers are expected to share this role of advocating and imposing this “new standard of civilization” (Ibid.). To

illustrate this development, Dunne (2003) has argued that after 9/11 the US insisted on being morally above other powers, and was willing to act outside the established rules of international society. US “exceptionalism” manifested itself in its “highly permissive understanding of the right of self-defence” anywhere in the world, its preventive military interventions, its opposition to “extending these justifications for the use of force to others”, and its disregard for international law (Dunne 2003: 316).

The result of Western domination in international society in the post-cold War era, and the promotion of liberal values, could be the development of dissent rather than higher levels of agreement in the relation between Western and other non-Western great or emerging powers because of the perceived illegitimacy of forcing such values upon others. This not only poses a threat to order in the system, according to Dunne (2003: 315-317), but also erodes the prospects for creating “thicker” international society in the post-Cold War era because these policies threaten such features as great power management, agreement over the use of force, and mutual consultation in ordering international politics that were characteristic of post-Cold War international politics. Suzuki (2008) has framed this as a conflict between the “legitimate great powers” of the West, and the emerging “frustrated great powers”. The latter are frustrated because they believe they have been refused social equality with the existing members of international society, and are not given the same constitutional privileges associated with “legitimate great power status”, and thus “perceive a mismatch between their own expectations and the actual ‘constitutional privileges’ they are (or are not) accorded” (Suzuki 2008: 49). As emerging great powers become frustrated, the basic agreements of international society are challenged. This opens up the question of how Russian authorities relate to this development.

3.3 Russia and international society

Why is it relevant to consider Russia in terms of international society and how it approaches military intervention? Russia’s rhetoric and justifications in this context give insights into how Russian leaders interpret the system in which they operate, and

the kind of international society they prefer. As Browning (2008: 15) notes, the point is that if shared “identifications are understood as central to any form of international society, then the stronger those identifications are, the greater the possibility for developing a thicker set of solidarist norms”. The question is whether Russia has been socialized into accepting shared norms in international society connected with military intervention and human rights, or whether it seeks to resist these trends and to create a different society than the one Western powers, particularly the US, promote. How Russia has engaged itself in the topic of military intervention to a large degree depends upon its acceptance of the expansion of Western influence in global politics, as well as the role it seeks to play in international relations. Arguably, there is tension between Russia’s desire to be accepted in international society and reclaim its great power status within it, as Neumann (2011) has demonstrated, while simultaneously remaining suspicious of the West’s intentions and the dominating role of the US in international society.

Russia has undergone significant changes since the late Soviet period and into the Putin era. Efforts by Mikhail Gorbachev at the end of the Soviet period to improve the relationship with the US and try to find common ground in international affairs, led to a “thickening” of the normative content of international society (Gvosdev 2014: 77-78). His new vision, called “New Thinking”, had a universalistic focus on foreign and security policy, aimed at “de-ideologisation” of international relations, and declared support of a more proactive role for the UN in dealing with conflicts. As a result, the Soviet Union and the US replaced their rivalry and reinforced their commitment to peace and security based on common values (McFarlane 2002: 47-48). This period of diplomatic synergy continued for a period after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. After the end of the Cold War Russia briefly pursued a policy of integration into Western-centered institutions, and abandoned its traditional regional ambitions and great power aspirations (Tsygankov 2012: 3).

However, the normative agreement between the Russian elite and the West was short-lived, and New Thinking failed to become generally accepted in the Russian elite. Sakwa (2002: 413) claims that some of the old concerns from the Cold War

period remained, primarily that the United States and NATO were still seeking dominance in the world. The deployment of foreign troops close to Russian borders was considered a direct military threat. In addition, the Russian Military doctrine of 1993 revealed a continuation of a block mentality and a deep sense of insecurity. The doctrine formalized the former Soviet republics as an extended security zone of Russia “and tried to endow the CIS⁷ with a military dimension, with Russia acting as a type of garrison state on behalf of the other members” (Sakwa 2002: 413-414). Most prominently, as the Russian state engaged in conflicts on its periphery and in North Caucasus, Russian leaders became more concerned with order in the CIS area.

Russia also felt humiliated, as Trenin (2006: 88) argues, because it was not treated as an equal member by Western powers. According to him, the Western states had too much focus on what to do with Eastern Europe after the fall of the Soviet Union, “rejoicing its victory in the Cold War, neglecting to define a strategy for post-Soviet Russia” (Ibid.). Maintaining even the pretense of superpower equality became impossible for major Western states, as Russia lagged far behind as a result of its decreasing capabilities. From the Western perspective, changes in Russia’s internal environment cast doubt on whether Russia could become a full member of the international society of great powers.

As a result of the feeling within the Russian political elite that Russia had lost its relative power and its status as an equal member of the international society, the leadership felt it was forced to adjust to new realities of the post-Cold War era (Tsygankov 2010: 76). By the mid-1990s, the disagreement between Russia and Western states on the norms and laws regulating global security and peace became increasingly apparent. In 1994, NATO launched its first air strike campaign against the Bosnian Serbs without consulting with Russian leaders. This reinforced Russia’s feeling of being excluded from the “concert of great powers”. President Boris Yeltsin made efforts to create a new approach and pursue Russia’s own specific interests from issue to issue with single NATO countries. This meant strengthening Russia’s

⁷ Common wealth of Independent States.

position, and being more supportive of the Serbian side. At the same time, NATO, and especially the US, became more assertive in their willingness to engage militarily in the Yugoslavian conflict. In 1999, a military campaign in Kosovo was carried out by NATO forces without a UN Security Council authorization, thereby sidelining Russia (Kubieck 2000: 554).

Fearing that Western states would become too dominating in deciding which norms and principles should apply in the international system, the newly elected President Vladimir Putin demanded that humanitarian intervention could not be a basis for overriding “such basic principles of international law as sovereignty and territorial integrity” (McFarlane 2002: 58). As Sakwa (2002: 414) argues, in the NATO campaign in Yugoslavia, the Russian feeling of insecurity was less motivated by sympathy for the Serbs “than by fear that the power imbalance in the post-Cold War order threatened the autonomy of less powerful states, among which Russia (together with China) now found itself. McFarlane (2002: 59) observes that Russia had both specific and general reasons for opposing the universality of norms endorsing the use of force to promote rights in other countries. Russia had been heavily criticized by the West for abusing human rights in Chechnya, and was concerned that Russia itself could be a potential target for Western intervention if a precedent was established. Russian authorities also feared that that the real agenda of the West was to impose their principles on non-Western states. Actions outside the UN framework were therefore a threat to their positions in international relations. Increasingly, the Russian authorities increased the focus on international order and the sovereignty of states at the expense of idealistic humanism (Allison 2013: 209).

The military intervention by the US in Iraq in 2003, executed unilaterally without UN Security Council endorsement, helped entrench Russian grievances towards US hegemony in international relations. As a result, the Russian leadership became increasingly assertive in reclaiming Russia’s role in international rule-making (Allison 2013: 68-69). Russia again sought to reclaim its vital role in influencing important conflicts in the world, and contested Western hegemony and its failure to include Russian interests (Tsygankov 2010: 48). Defending and favoring the pluralist

view of international society, Russia insisted that international law and the UN were the fundamental institutions of international society, and that any intervention must adhere strictly to international rules. This focus was essential for Russia's claims to great power status. Having a permanent seat in the Security Council and emphasizing great power management reinforced Russia's ambitions (Browning 2008: 13).

Russia continued its preoccupation with preserving norms of sovereignty, non-intervention, territoriality, and the maintenance of boundaries, especially after Putin's second term as president from 2004 (Browning 2008: 12, McFarlane 2006: 56). Under Putin, Russia became increasingly suspicious of what it perceived as aggressive Western policies to influence the post-Soviet space, leading to the "colour revolutions". This was understood as efforts to weaken Russian interests and its position (Kuchins and Zevelev 2012: 155). In his 2006 State of the Union Speech, Vladimir Putin argued that the international system was becoming increasingly hostile and dangerous. The Russian leader saw three main destabilizing factors: the end of the bipolar system had created unpredictability in international affairs, Cold War stereotypes were still present in the West, and "Western states, especially the United States, undermined international law and forced their view on other nations" (Thorun 2009: 31). Putin interpreted attempts to promote universal ethics or common standards of human rights as culturally biased and dangerous and a threat to international order in international society. Putin pointed to the dangerous trend when states apply humanitarian principles selectively and use the rhetoric of humanitarian concern as a pretext to cover self-interest motivations.

Despite the obvious skepticism towards the humanitarian doctrine of solidarism, Russian authorities have talked about their commitment to modernize and revitalize external relations with Western states. Snetkov (2011: 2) points to the increased focus since 2008/9 on improving key international relationships, "as witnessed by its attitude towards the "reset" of relations with the US under President Obama and the proposal for a new security strategy with Europe". Officially, Russia is not against the obligation to protect populations from mass atrocities. In 2005 and 2009, Russia did not vote against the creation of the R2P concept. It also abstained from voting against

its implementation before the intervention in Libya in 2011. According to Glanville (2013: 337), this could indicate that the Russian authorities to some extent accepted and internalized the norm of civilian protection and could signal a slight departure from the “thin” pluralist model based on the principles of state sovereignty and non-intervention.

Given that Russian authorities oppose the emergence of Western solidarist trends to emerge in international society, Allison (2013: 165-167) has concluded that the reference to the humanitarian doctrine by Russian authorities are instrumentally and cynically applied, motivated by the wish to pursue their own interests, and not by a wish to internalize Western values. This entails willingness by the Russian leadership to come up with their own interpretations of genocide, humanitarian intervention and the responsibility to protect, and to take international law in their own hands in order to justify the pursuit of controversial policies, such as interventions. In Russia’s “near abroad” in the post-Soviet states, this could either imply that the humanitarian claims are hastily formulated in order to justify exceptional use of force, or that such justifications are more strategic, meaning that the Russian government seek acceptance for its own definition of rules and norms in its “zone of privileged interests” (Ibid.).

However, some scholars challenge the perception of a hypocritical or cynical policy by the Russian authorities. According to Kurowska (2014: 19), the analytical position “to attribute strategic abuse of the humanitarian doctrine to the pursuit of geopolitical goals (...) provides only a trivial explanation and thus ignores the origins of the current controversy”. The current defiant tone of Russia’s foreign policy choices, she argues, stem from a perceived feeling of humiliation by the West. As the resistance to liberal norms and contested humanitarian intervention by Russia failed, this led to the current authorities’ normative defiance of the liberal world order. Central to this position is the insistence of multipolarity, premised on the idea that various regional “poles” decide independently on the implementation of democratic values, and that each state has the right to protect its own culture and institutions. This

liberates Russia from the “normative pull of Western hegemonic order” (Kurowska 2014: 3-4).

Kurowska (2014: 19) also argues that a challenge of “tracking to what extent Russia has—or has failed to—advanced from a traditional pluralist to a solidarist liberal ideology of international society” arises, since this would entail an analysis in line with a progressive and linear understanding of norm evolution. The point is that this perspective underestimates the normative commitments that underpin Russia’s strategic contestation of the humanitarian doctrine and the ideas that shape Russia’s behavior.

Sakwa (2013: 199) claims that Russia has not been preoccupied with challenging the existing constitution of international society world order, but has insisted on its place within that order by modifying it “in a way that would give Russia what is perceived to be its due weight and to ensure that the hegemonic powers apply their normative declarations to themselves as well as to others”. Sakwa calls this policy neo-revisionist (Ibid.), and claims that it is based on more than pure resentment. It also reflects frustration that international society at the end of the Cold War was unable to adapt to new realities (Sakwa 2013: 214). The term “sovereign democracy”, frequently used by Russian leaders, is used as a reply to the American democratic evangelism and the concept of democratization, and also to underpin the perception of the existence of the post-Soviet sphere as an alternative pole in the international system (Ibid.). According to Sakwa (Ibid.), Russia has therefore emerged as a defender of the pluralist international society based on how it had developed in the post-war years. For this reason, McFarlane (2006: 56) observes that Russian leaders seek to “maintain or restore the position of the United Nations as the principal global multilateral security institution”, not least, he argues, because “for historical reasons, Russia enjoys a level of influence and status in the organization that is disproportionate to its current capabilities”.

3.4 Solidarism and Pluralism

In order to categorize the justifications by the Russian leadership in the Georgian and Syrian cases, the solidarist and pluralist versions of international society are constructed as ideal types. In table 1 (page 42), the two ideal types are presented and operationalized. Operationalization is the process of defining theoretically constructed concepts into measureable indicators that the empirical data can be held up against. The indicators of the two ideal types are theoretically derived from the above assessment of the solidarist and pluralist versions of international society. Ensuring that the “operationalization captures the ideas contained in the systematized concept” and not other irrelevant aspects is essential in this process (Adcock and Collier 2001: 536). In other words, the indicators must accurately capture the content of the concept. The primary goal of constructing good operationalizations is to provide high measurement validity. Measurement validity is the extent to which the concepts are measured correctly, meaning that you measure what you think you are measuring (King et al. 1994: 25). It is therefore equally important that the indicators of the two concepts are mutually exclusive from each other to avoid any overlapping of the two positions.

Justifying the official stance on military interventions is a complex matter, and involves nuances which the ideal types are not always able to capture. The statements analyzed do not necessarily express the same wording as the indicators suggest, and therefore also require an interpretation of the content of the arguments. The Russian authorities may also draw from both ideal types in their justification. For instance, the principle of state sovereignty may be presented as “more or less” in different contexts, rather than as “either/or”. One of the challenges of the analysis is therefore to sort and interpret the justifications, since the indicators of the ideal types are not necessarily pointed to by the Russian authorities. Some indicators may also be more apparent and traceable in one of the cases. If some arguments fail to be captured by the ideal types, this is not necessarily detrimental to the analysis, but should be included in the conclusions of the analysis (Bratberg 2014: 74-75).

In Table 1 the ideal types are schematically presented. In the following chapter I analyze the justifications by the Russian authorities in the Georgian and Syrian cases and evaluate the extent to which these two ideal types were expressed.

Table 1: The ideal types

The Solidarist position	The Pluralist position
The international society can agree to more than the basic principles of state sovereignty and non-intervention	States can only agree to the basic principles of state sovereignty and non-intervention upholding order in international society
Military intervention is justifiable to protect human lives	Military intervention is not justifiable without UN authorization
The state has the responsibility to provide security for its peoples	Upholding order among states is the most important responsibility
Military interventions are driven by the need to prevent human suffering	Military interventions without UN authorization are generally driven by other motivations than purely idealistic ones
Human needs trump state needs	State needs trump human needs
UN Council authorization is preferred, but not necessary, to protect human lives in emergency situations	UN Council authorization must be given
States have developed a basic common understanding of justice and solidarity that is universal to all states	States do not have a common understanding of what constitutes a humanitarian emergency
State sovereignty can be violated in cases of violations of human rights	Respecting state sovereignty is more important than preventing human rights violations

4 Analysis

4.1 Part one: analyzing the justifications

This chapter consists of two parts. The aim of part one is to answer the first research question: *How was the allegedly contradictory stance on military interventions in the cases of Georgia and Syria justified by the Russian leadership, and which ideas of international society were presented?* The analysis of the justifications of military intervention in each case is preceded by a brief presentation of the background and developments of the conflicts. In part two, the results are compared and discussed. Finally, the chapter sums up the findings and critically evaluates the methodological framework used in the analysis.

4.1.1 Military intervention in Georgia

The background for the conflict

The tension between Abkhaz, Ossetians and Georgians has existed for a long time. Essentially, these conflicts revolved around claims of territorial control and self-governance. The Soviet power quite efficiently prevented conflicts from arising in the region, but instead of resolving conflicts, they were repressed. During the Soviet era, South Ossetia had autonomous status within the Georgian republic (King 2008: 4). Already before the Soviet break-up, South Ossetia's Regional Soviet adopted a resolution declaring South Ossetia's sovereignty (IIFFM 2009a: 63, 71). This was abolished by the Georgian Parliament in 1990. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Georgia distanced itself from Moscow and achieved independence in 1991, but South Ossetia also sought to achieve its own independence from Georgia. As a result, Georgian forces launched a military campaign to end the South Ossetian secessionist movement, but were defeated. Fearing that Abkhazians would follow the example of South Ossetia, Georgian troops again launched an attack, this time in Abkhazia, to preserve its territorial integrity. Georgian military again failed to achieve its aim (King 2008: 4). Fighting did not end, however, and Russia officially engaged itself as a

mediator. As several peace agreements failed to be respected, fighting finally ended with the signing of the Moscow Agreement of 1994 mediated by Russia and the UN. It provided a ceasefire and the deployment of peacekeepers - almost exclusively Russian troops. The agreement was endorsed by the UN Security Council (IIFFM 2009a: 77-79).

Since then, Russia helped to entrench the de facto independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. International negotiators tried to establish new agreements of reintegration, but these so-called frozen conflicts gained little international attention (King 2008: 5). Russia was criticized, especially by Georgia, for not being an honest mediator. Russia increased its links with the breakaway territories, granted Russian passports to their populations⁸, and made declarations about using the Kosovo precedent as a basis for the recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia (IIFFM 2009a: 121). Before Russia's military intervention took place, the Russian peacekeeping troops had been deployed there for 15 years.

Prior to the Russian intervention tension increased as a result of several factors. During the 2004 "rose revolution" in Georgia the pro-democratic movement led by Mikheil Saakashvili adopted a critical position to the Russian regime (McFaul 2005: 5). The new government's policy aimed at deepening the security ties between Georgia and NATO, which Russia perceived as a threat. During the Bucharest NATO summit of 2-3 April 2008, Georgia and Ukraine were promised a future membership. In addition, Kosovo unilaterally declared its independence with the official recognition by around fifty states. This fundamentally challenged Russia's position in the international arena. As a response, Russia intensified its direct links to the secessionist regions in a number of fields (IIFFM 2009a: 25, 123). Putin insisted that

⁸ For over a decade, Russia had provided Russian passports to South Ossetians and Abkhazians. According to EU's fact-finding report, this "passportisation" of the population in Abkhazia and South Ossetia began in large scale in 2002 (IIFFM 2009a: 148). Although Georgian officials had criticized this policy for violating the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia and the principle of non-interference in internal affairs of sovereign states, Russian officials argued that the granting of Russian citizenship to those who were entitled to it was in accordance with Russian law (Ibid.). However, the fact-finding report finds that Russia's policy of "passportisation" outside its territory is not in conformity with international law (IIFFM 2009a: 169).

we need common principles to these problems for the benefit of all people living in conflict-stricken territories... If people believe that Kosovo can get full independence, why then should we deny it to Abkhazia and South Ossetia? (Akçakoca et al. 2009: 9).

Only days before the intervention, the Georgians feared that the separatist authorities and the Russians were preparing an offensive, and responded on the night of 7-8 August with an attack on the South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali, “killing many civilians and more than 10 Russian peace-keepers” (Filippov 2009: 1838, King 2008: 2). Although there has been disagreement about who started the hostilities and how they started, most international observers have concluded that the Georgian government initiated the attack in the evening and night of 7-8 August 2008 (Gvosdev and Marsh 2014: 177, IIFFM 2009a: 209). By the next morning, Georgian forces had secured both the town of Tskhinvali and taken control over strategically important roads leading from the Roki tunnel to Tskhinvali in order to block movements of the Russian troops from the north (IIFFM 2009a: 209). Russia quickly retaliated with a full-scale military attack lasting five days (King 2008: 2).

Justifying Russia’s stance in Georgia

As the military attack in Georgia was not preceded by debate in the UN Security Council, Russian leaders initially justified Russian’s military intervention by presenting claims of self-defense consistent with article 51 of the UN Charter. On 8 August, President Medvedev stated that Georgian forces had “committed an act of aggression against Russian peacekeepers and the civilian population located in South Ossetia, (...) the majority of whom are Russian citizens” (Medvedev 2008a).⁹ According to Medvedev, he, as the President, had the responsibility to protect the lives of Russian citizens as stated in the Constitution of the Russian Federation. He also pointed to Georgia’s “gross violation of international law”, and that it violated the

⁹ «Сегодня ночью в Южной Осетии грузинские войска, по сути, совершили акт агрессии против российских миротворцев и мирных жителей (...) большинство из них – это граждане Российской Федерации».

mandate which Russia, as a peace regulating partner, had been given by the international community (Ibid.).¹⁰

Medvedev here referred to each state's right to protect itself from foreign aggression. According to the UN Charter, and also the Westphalian model of state sovereignty, a response to such aggression without a UN mandate must be *proportionate* and *necessary*. The military operation to defend only the Russian peacekeepers could thus be legally justified if these criteria were backed by article 51 of the UN Charter (IIMFF 2009a: 274). Medvedev's initial justification aimed at showing that Georgia was the initiator of the hostilities, and that Russia therefore had legal grounds to intervene militarily. However, this justification was problematic given the fact that the Russian peacekeepers and civilian population were located *outside* Russian borders. The aggressive acts committed by the Georgian authorities were within the Georgian state, and did not violate Russian state sovereignty. Medvedev seemed to present the first Russian operations as legally just, since they were merely responding to a military threat against Russia. Such an argument nevertheless underpins a pluralist approach, since each state is allowed to respond to attacks by other states.

However, Medvedev also emphasized that acts had been committed against the civilian population of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, deeming it necessary for Russia to protect the civilian population, suggesting that Russia has a historic obligation to secure the peace of the peoples of the Caucasus.¹¹ This seems to suggest that Medvedev is concerned with the civilian population in the Caucasus region, outside Russian borders. This argument goes further than the "thin" version of international society, stressing the moral obligation of protecting the civilian population by intervening.

Medvedev's statement was followed up by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov the same day, justifying Russia's right and duty to protect Russian citizens and

¹⁰ «...это грубейшее нарушение международного права и тех мандатов, которые были когда-то выданы России мировым сообществом как партнёру по мирному урегулированию».

¹¹ «Россия исторически была и останется гарантом безопасности народов Кавказа».

peacekeepers from Georgian aggression. He claimed that “Georgian forces had committed aggressive acts against the South Ossetian population” and that it constituted a “humanitarian catastrophe” (Lavrov 2008a).¹² He also suggested that there had been reports of acts of genocide (Ibid.).¹³ There were claims from the Russian side that as many as over 2000 people had been slaughtered, and that the only ones who could reestablish peace were the Russian peacekeepers (Ibid.).¹⁴¹⁵ As a result of these claims, Lavrov referred to the responsibility to protect Russian citizens in an interview the following day in order to promote peace and stability (Lavrov 2008b).¹⁶ He also claimed that

According to our Constitution there is also responsibility to protect – the term which is very widely used in the UN when people see some trouble in Africa or in any remote part of other regions. But this is not Africa to us, this is next door. This is the area, where Russian citizens live. So the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the laws of the Russian Federation make it absolutely unavoidable to us to exercise responsibility to protect (Ibid.).

Lavrov thereby justified the need to quickly intervene in the conflict, even without a UN mandate, to protect the Russian peacekeepers and the civilian population in South Ossetia. As the situation amounted to a humanitarian catastrophe and a threat to peace and security, he claimed, Russia had a duty to intervene. In addition, Lavrov insisted on the relevance of the R2P. Arguably, this indicates a solidarist position since he considered it a moral obligation to intervene in order to prevent human rights abuses. Lavrov defended the R2P norm that the state must provide security for its peoples, and if not, a military intervention is justifiable to protect human lives.

¹² «...агрессивные действия против югоосетинского народа» (...) «назревает гуманитарная катастрофа».

¹³ «Появились сообщения об этнических чистках в селах Южной Осетии».

¹⁴ «Переломить ситуацию удалось только подкреплению российских миротворцев».

¹⁵ The number of casualties has been disputed, but the number presented by the Russian part has been shown to be grossly overstated. According to EUs fact-finding report the figure of civilian losses was eventually reduced to 162 (IFFM 2009b: 222).

¹⁶ «Responsibility to protect our citizens under the Russian constitution and the responsibilities of the peacekeepers to keep this particular case when peace was raped to restore peace».

Claiming that genocide was taking place, only strengthened this obligation. The state sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia was therefore less important than preventing a humanitarian emergency.

In an emergency meeting in the Security Council on 8 August, Russia's Permanent Representative at the UN, Vitaly Churkin, argued that "military action had been taken in self-defense after repeated armed provocations, and with the sole goal of protecting civilians" (UN Security Council 2008a). This claim was rejected by other member states, demanding that Russia pull its forces back in order to not further inflame the situation. The US Representative also called on the parties to respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia (Ibid.). The large-scale movement of Russian forces into Georgian territory evidently exceeded the criteria of proportionality and necessity (IIFFM 2009b: 279-280), which Churkin justified as a necessary act in order to prevent the humanitarian catastrophe from escalating. The arguments presented by Churkin underpin a more solidarist approach, because the focus on the obligation by other states to intervene in the conflict in order to prevent human suffering on Georgian territory goes further than a pure self-defense claim.

Russian forces were quickly able to seize control over Tskhinvali, and also extended their attacks to central Georgia. A third UN Council emergency meeting was held, where the US representative asked Russia to carefully consider the implication of its aggression towards a sovereign state. Churkin repeated that Russia's intent was to "protect Russian citizens and provide support to peacekeepers and humanitarian assistance to the civilian population in the zone of conflict" (Churkin 2008a). This, he claimed, was "in accordance with its right of self-defence under the United Nations Charter" (Ibid.). Drawing the parallel to Srebrenica, he asked whether it would be better if the peacekeepers ran away as they had done there. Russia had, according to him, responded appropriately (Ibid.). In a letter sent to the UN Security Council, Churkin claimed that the Georgian attacks constituted an "illegal use of military force against the Russian Federation" (Churkin 2008b). "In those circumstances", he insisted, "the Russian side had no choice but to use its inherent right to self-defence enshrined in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations" (Ibid.). Churkin here

emphasized previous self-defense claims, in that the attack on Russian peacekeepers and Russian passport-holders constituted an attack on Russian sovereignty. Such a response did not necessitate a UN mandate. According to Churkin, Georgia had violated the sovereignty of Russia, even though the Russian peacekeepers were situated *outside* of Russian borders. This claim was still based on a Westphalian, pluralist model, where each state may legitimately defend itself. Churkin also stressed the need to provide assistance to the civilian population, suggesting more concern with humanitarian issues than a pure pluralist position.

On the first day of the conflict, Lavrov claimed that Russia for many years had tried to reach a agreement with President Saakashvili forbidding the use of force, but that this had been turned down (Lavrov 2008a). Lavrov claimed that Saakashvili had said that he would never use force upon his own population, but that his behavior showed that this was indeed his intent. This, he argued, “raises the question of the competence of Georgia as a state and as a responsible member of the international society” (Ibid.).¹⁷ This point was also raised in a conversation between Lavrov and State Secretary Condoleezza Rice the same day, in which Lavrov stressed that “the current authorities of Georgia had for a long time been preparing an operation against the Ossetian people, while covering themselves behind a rhetorical commitment to promote stability” (Lavrov 2008c).¹⁸ Lavrov continued to condemn the Georgian authorities, pointing to the incompetence of Saakashvili as a state leader, and argued that he “can no longer be a responsible negotiation partner” (Lavrov 2008f).¹⁹ This led to a discussion between the Russian and American parts, because Rice understood Lavrov’s statement as a demand that Saakashvili had to leave his post. American officials claimed that “Lavrov demanded in the conversation with Condoleezza Rice that the democratically elected President Saakashvili must step down. We think this is unacceptable” (RIA Novosti 2008).²⁰ Commenting on this discussion, Churkin

¹⁷ «И все это ставит под большой вопрос состоятельность Грузии как государства и как ответственного члена мирового сообщества».

¹⁸ «...нынешнее грузинское руководство, прикрываясь словами о приверженности задачам урегулирования, уже длительное время готовило силовую операцию против осетинского народа».

¹⁹ «Я убежден, что М.Н.Саакашвили больше не может быть вменяемым партнером по переговорам».

²⁰ «Лавров в беседе с госсекретарем США Кондолизой Райс сказал, что демократически выбранный президент Грузии должен уйти. Мы считаем, что это недопустимо».

claimed that “there are times when democratically elected leaders must go” (Ibid.).²¹ In another statement, Lavov said that “I don’t think Russia will be in the mood to negotiate with Mr Saakashvili, nor to speak with him” (Vedomosti 2008).²²

These arguments were seemingly aimed at delegitimizing and condemning Saakasvhili and the Georgian leadership, as s result of their alleged inability to provide security for the population situated on Georgian territory. Suggesting that Saakashvili had to go because of his failure to uphold certain moral standards, violates pluralist principles resting on the mutual recognition of each state’s right to exist and to exercise authority over its own borders. This entails that states should refrain from interfering in the internal matters of other states. That other states should have a responsibility to intervene or to provide humanitarian assistance to the civilian population if the state leaders cannot provide security for its own population, underpins a solidarist position. Lavrov and Churkin disputed that the Russian leadership could not relate to the Georgian leader, placing the rights of the individuals in Georgia at the center, rather than the rights of the state. The human needs outweighed the state needs. Russia was clearly open to the exception to the rule of non-intervention at the expense of saving civilians, since the Georgian authorities had lost their “right” to be respected as a full member of the international society.

Russian forces went deep into Georgian territory, and secured Georgia’s main Black Sea port before Medvedev declared the end of the military offensive on 12 August. A peace agreement was signed during the visit by French president Nicolas Sarkozy to Tbilisi and Moscow to end the military operations (IIFFM 2009a: 213, 219). At the subsequent press conference, Medvedev claimed that Russia’s objective of the five-day operations was to “coerce the Georgian authorities to peace” (Medvedev 2008b),²³ an expression that would be repeated by other Russian leaders. When asked about the sovereignty of Georgia, he replied that “Russia unquestionably recognizes the independence of Georgian authorities”, but emphasized that “this

²¹ «...бывают ситуации, когда и демократически избранные главы государств уходят».

²² «Я не думаю, что у России будет настроение не только вести переговоры, но и разговаривать с господином Саакашвили».

²³ «...операция по принуждению грузинских властей к миру».

doesn't mean that a sovereign state can do as it wishes. Even sovereign states must answer for their actions" (Ibid.).²⁴ This reaffirmed the idea that sovereign states have a responsibility to provide security for their population. It also underlines the idea that state sovereignty is not absolute in all cases, and that in pressing situations, the international society must intervene in order to provide peace and security. The argument thus suggests that state sovereignty is contingent on the authorities' behaviors towards their population. Medvedev's arguments therefore treated the individuals as the legitimate and the ultimate members of the international society, with the accompanying rights and duties they should hold in international law. The idea of "coercing" another state to peace, also suggests the same notion – if a state fails to uphold a "morally sound" society and violates humanitarian law, then military intervention by other states is justifiable.

At the press conference, Medvedev explicitly compared the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to Kosovo, and argued that "the question of sovereignty of Abkhazians and Ossetians "must be given to them, and they will give an unambiguous answer" (Medvedev 2008b).²⁵ He continued that "other states, whether Russia or others, should not be the ones answering it" (Ibid.).²⁶ On 26 August Medvedev signed an official recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, contradicting his claim that it was up to the Ossetians and Abkhazians to decide (Pravda 2008). Commenting on the recognition, Lavrov stated that the threat of aggression from the Georgian government will continue, "as long as Saakashvili remains in power" (as cited in Newsru 2008).²⁷ Again, Lavrov aimed at questioning the legitimacy of Saakashvili as a leader, thereby justifying Russia's acts as necessary to protect the civilians living in Georgia. Here, Medvedev and Lavrov defend the solidarist position because the individuals are placed at the center of focus, and the legitimacy of democratically elected leaders are questioned.

²⁴ «Безусловно, признаёт, равно как и независимость грузинской власти от каких-либо других властей. Но это не значит, что суверенное государство имеет возможность делать всё, что ему заблагорассудится. Даже суверенные государства должны отвечать за свои действия».

²⁵ «Этот вопрос нужно задать им самим, и они дадут на него свой недвусмысленный ответ».

²⁶ «На этот вопрос не должна отвечать ни Россия, ни какие-либо другие государства».

²⁷ «...пока у власти Михаил Саакашвили».

When asked about the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia, Lavrov stated that “we can forget about speaking of the territorial integrity of Georgia, since making Abkhazians and South Ossetians agree to this logic, that they should be pressured by force back into the Georgian state, will be impossible” (Lavrov 2008d).²⁸ “The South Ossetians and Abkhazians”, he continued, “simply do not want to live in a state where the leader sends military forces upon them” (Ibid.).²⁹ He also argued that “Saakashvili causes enormous harm not only to the South Ossetians and Abkhazians..., but also to Georgians – his own people” (Ibid.).³⁰ These arguments again stress the notion that Saakashvili had violated humanitarian norms and that the people living in Georgia are more important than respecting the sovereignty of Georgia. Lavrov’s intent to question the territorial integrity of Georgia is quite clear. He presents the situation as a necessary enforcement by Russia to prevent the Georgian aggression that violated international law, thereby legitimizing a military intervention to save human lives. He also points to the need for protection of the people of Georgia, not only South Ossetians and Abkhazians, thus prioritizing human needs over state needs. According to these justifications, the sovereignty of Georgia could be disrespected to reach the higher goal of protecting the civilians, underlining a solidarist approach to international society.

In the aftermath of the intervention in Georgia, Russian leaders gave interviews where they justified their actions. In an interview with the CNN, then Prime Minister Vladimir Putin gave a thorough account of the historical justifications for Russia’s stance on its campaign in Georgia. He deeply disagreed with the use of the term “military intervention”, because Russia had “not attacked anyone. It is we who are demanding guarantees from others, to make sure that no one attacks us anymore and that no one kills our citizens. We are being portrayed as the aggressor” (Putin 2008). He also drew parallels to the bombings of Kosovo in 1999, claiming that the US were

²⁸ «...можно забыть о разговорах по поводу территориальной целостности Грузии, поскольку заставить осетин, абхазов согласиться с такой логикой, что их можно силой вернуть в грузинское государство, будет невозможно».

²⁹ «...ни югоосетины, ни абхазы просто не хотят жить вместе в одном государстве с человеком, который направляет свои войска против них».

³⁰ «Саакашвили наносит колоссальный вред не только югоосетинам, не только абхазам ..., но и грузинам – своему собственному народу».

using double standards when accepting the right of self-determination of the people of Kosovo, while ignoring the wishes of “the small nations of the Caucasus as to why independence can be gained in Kosovo but not here” (Ibid.). He further stressed that “there are both things in international law: the principle of territorial integrity and the right to self-determination. What's needed is simply to reach an agreement on the ground rules. I would think that the time has finally come to do it” (Ibid.).

For Putin, it seems important to portray the Russian acts as self-defense, and within the boundaries of international law. Putin's refusal to label Russia's operations as a military intervention paints Georgia as the violator of international law, while Russia only acted according to its obligation to prevent human suffering. By denying that Russia acted outside the UN framework, he arguably promoted a Westphalian model, in which states have the legal right to respond to a military attack from the outside. Putin also appeared less inclined to stress the need to protect civilians, and insinuated that the Russian passport-holding civilians “wished” for the protection by the Russian Federation when arguing for the right of self-determination. He also avoided using more solidarist language, including the focus on individuals as a justification for the intervention. This indicates a more pluralist expression of international society compared to other Russian leaders. He also criticized Western states for accepting the independence of Kosovo, but on the other side denying the legitimacy of self-determination of nations in the post-Soviet sphere. These claims were seemingly aimed at criticizing Western normative developments in the international society, and at insisting that Russia's demands and opinions are respected. Arguably, Putin seemed more occupied with criticizing Western states and their approach to protection of human suffering in other states. He suggested that the international society therefore has to reach a consensus on what rules and norms should apply, because the norms in the international society are still unclear. His justifications also seem to hint that Russia perceives it legitimate to protect minorities that suffer under the violations of humanitarian law, but perhaps only in its own “near abroad”.

Medvedev gave several interviews in the preceding month of the five-day operations. During this period Russian acts were heavily criticized by the international community, especially by Western leaders. Responding to the critique, Medvedev pointed to the parallels to the Kosovo case, criticizing Western leaders who insisted that Kosovo be treated as “*sui generis*”, or as a “unique case”. In an article in the *Financial Times*, Medvedev claimed it would be impossible “to tell the Abkhazians and Ossetians (and dozens of other groups around the world) that what was good for the Kosovo Albanians, was not good for them. In international relations, you cannot have one rule for some and another rule for others” (Medvedev 2008e). According to him, the Abkhazian and South Ossetian cases were also unique by the same standard (Medvedev 2008c). These arguments criticize Western leaders for deciding unilaterally what rules should apply in international relations, and suggest that these rules are applied first and foremost to strengthen Western interests. Arguably, he questions the real intent of the Western style of intervention, and suggests that Russia should also have the right to decide the fate of civilians wishing to secede from a state that perpetrates crimes against them.

Further, Medvedev argued that the decision to engage militarily was entirely based on “preventing genocide, the destruction of entire peoples and to help them get back on their feet” (Ibid.).³¹ In order to save these peoples from the same fate in the future, Russia would have to recognize them as subjects of international law, which is “fully conforms to international norms, the UN Charter, the well-known Helsinki Accords³² and other international laws” (Ibid.).³³ Medvedev also pointed his critique to the Georgian president, arguing that “Saakashvili opted for genocide to accomplish his political objectives,” and by doing so, “he himself dashed all the hopes for the peaceful co-existence of Ossetians, Abkhazians and Georgians in a single state” (Medvedev 2008f). In another interview, Medvedev (2008d) stated that “protecting the lives and

³¹ «...чтобы предотвратить геноцид, истребление народов и помочь им встать на ноги».

³² The Helsinki Accords of 1975 contained an agreement between West European democracies and the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact countries to uphold human rights.

³³ «Поэтому наш ответ в этом смысле полностью основан на международном праве, на Уставе ООН, на известных хельсинкских декларациях и на других международных актах».

dignity of our citizens, wherever they may be, is an unquestionable priority for our country”.

Medvedev’s argument that the Russian operations were solely driven by humanitarian concerns, underpins a solidarist understanding of international society. His argument suggested that the international community needed to protect the civilians in Georgia in order to prevent the Georgian authorities from committing crimes against its own population, and if it failed to accept this obligation, Russia had to take matters in its own hands. To a larger degree than Putin, Medvedev argued for the need to protect the civilian population from atrocities committed by the Georgian authorities. The critique of Saakashvili also strengthens the claim that state sovereignty should be limited in some instances if the state cannot provide security for their own peoples. Drawing the parallel to Kosovo, Medvedev also reaffirmed the arguments made by Putin that the recognition of Kosovo by Western states was biased. Medvedev argued that Russia, as a moral upholder of the international society, had an obligation to protect the peoples of Georgia, and the way to do this was to let South Ossetians and Abkhazians decide for themselves if they wanted independence. He therefore insisted that Russia’s acts were morally legitimate because they were aimed at helping the civilian population that suffered under the rule of the Georgian leadership. The responsibility to protect seemed particularly strong if it involved Russian citizens.

Answering President George Bush’s critique of Russia’s acts, Lavrov fired back at the “hypocrisy” of the West. He argued that they only became worried when “Russia took action to protect civilians (...) and not when genocide was taking place right under their noses, as had happened in Srebrenica before” (Lavrov 2008d).³⁴ Lavrov here insinuated that the US criticizes Russia for having geopolitical and strategic motivations for intervening, not humanitarian, and that the US therefore uses double standards. Seemingly, his argument supports the view expressed by Putin and Medvedev that international society should agree to what constitutes a humanitarian crisis, and that states should intervene when genocide is taking place. Since the

³⁴ «...российское руководство приняло решение защитить мирных жителей (...) когда под их носом будет вершиться этническая чистка, как это было в Сребренице в свое время».

intervention in Georgia was done within the confinements of solidarist normative trends, he suggested that it should not be deemed illegitimate by the same Western states that have been promoting these norms. In another press conference on 26 August, he argued that Russia's "decision was absolutely necessary from a legal, historical and moral point of view" (Lavrov 2008f).³⁵ Echoing previous claims, he justified the expansion into Georgian territory as a necessary enforcement in order to "coerce Georgia to peace, since Georgia had severely violated all the agreements" (Ibid.).³⁶ Again, this underpins a solidarist view since he suggested that there must be a moral component in state behavior, where each state has an obligation in the international society to provide security for its population, and if this is not achieved, a military intervention is morally and legally necessary. Also, he claimed that "the current government of Georgia is a special project of the United States" (Ibid.).³⁷ This may be understood as a pluralist position because the US had apparently not respected the sovereignty of Georgia prior to the Russian intervention, and had tried to influence it to become more integrated in the Western security infrastructure of NATO.

On 26 August Medvedev signed a decree recognizing the independence of the republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Medvedev insisted that this was "the sole chance of saving peoples' lives" (Phillips 2008). Referring to the UN Charter, he argued that "each state has the duty to abide by the principles of equality and self-determination of peoples, and the duty to have authorities which represent the entire population living on its territories" (Ibid.).³⁸ The recognition was rejected by the international community, and only Nicaragua, Venezuela and the Pacific island of Nauru have followed Russia's recognition (Civil 2014). On one side, this could be understood as a solidarist argument where Russia sympathizes with the civilian people of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and that Western states could not agree to such actions

³⁵ «...наше решение было единственно возможным и с точки зрения права, и с точки зрения истории, и с точки зрения справедливости и морали».

³⁶ «И направило подкрепление для того, чтобы осуществить операцию по принуждению к миру грузинской стороны, грубо нарушившей все соглашения».

³⁷ «...нынешнее грузинское руководство – это специальный проект Соединенных Штатов».

³⁸ «...государство обязано в своих действиях соблюдать принцип равноправия и самоопределения народов и обязано иметь правительство, которое представляет весь народ, проживающий на данной территории».

because they violated Georgia's territorial integrity. On the other side, it could be understood as Russia insisting that unique "regional" norms in Russia's near abroad must be respected by the international society, and that Western states, particularly the US, should not interfere in Russia's extended zone of interest. By trumping humanitarian concern over state sovereignty and territorial integrity, the justification nevertheless indicate a solidarist position.

4.1.2 Non-intervention in Syria

The background for the conflict

Syria was shook by the Arab uprisings that spread though Middle-Eastern and North-African countries. During the spring of 2011, demonstrators started to demand more freedom and political and economic reform. Increasingly, they called for the downfall of the regime, which was answered by the authorities with violent repression (S/PV 6524: 2). President Bashar al-Assad promised to undertake a series of reforms and appointed new local officials. The protesters claimed that this was not enough and too late. On 21 April al-Assad lifted the state of emergency, which had been used since al-Assad's Baath Party came to power in 1963 "to justify arbitrary arrests and detention and a ban on all opposition" (Reuters 2011). However, it was only symbolic, since Syrian laws provided wide powers to the entrenched security forces. Quickly, the situation in Syria escalated into a civil conflict and humanitarian emergency (UN Security Council 2011a, Allison 2013: 795).

By January 2014 approximately 140.000 Syrians have died, including over 7000 children, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (2014). The international community has not been able to prevent further escalation of the conflict or to create a common approach to the Syrian crisis, arguably as a result of Russian and Chinese vetoes of every proposed resolution in the UN Security Council.

Justifying Russia's stance on Syria

In response to the initial worries expressed by members of the UN Security Council, Russian deputy UN ambassador Alexander Pankin assured that the situation in Syria, “despite increasing tension and confrontations, does not present a threat to international peace and security” (UN Security Council 2011a). Such a threat, he argued, could “arise from outside interference in Syria’s domestic situation, including attempts to promote ready-made solutions or to take sides” (Ibid.). By this, Pankin highlighted the necessity of reaching a consensus on whether the situation constituted a threat to peace and security before any action was taken to intervene. Unless consensus was reached in the international society, a military intervention was considered illegal and illegitimate. Arguably, this defends the pluralist version of the international society. Pankin argued that the real threat to the stability in the international society is outside interference in the internal matters of Syria by other states. The argument that the situation in Syria was not a threat to international peace and security should be understood as an expression of the pluralist position that the international society cannot reach an agreement on what constitutes a supreme humanitarian emergency. States can only agree on a minimum set of principles, which are manifested in reciprocal recognition of state sovereignty and the norm of non-intervention.

Dmitry Medvedev, president of Russia at that time, compared in an interview the cases of Georgia, Libya and Syria, claiming that they were all unique cases. Prior to the intervention in Libya in 2011, Russia did not block the UN resolution leading to the intervention, but according to Medvedev, “instilling order in Libya through military means” was not “the right thing to do” (Medvedev 2011). In Syria, he argued that he would continue to negotiate with al-Assad, demanding that he “launch reforms, reconcile with the opposition, restore civil accord, and start developing a modern state” (Ibid.). If not, he claimed, al-Assad is “in for a grim fate, and [Russia] will eventually have to take some decisions on Syria” (Ibid.). Medvedev went on to compare the Syrian to the Libyan case, insisting that President al-Assad did not order the slaughter of his own people, as Libyan ruler Muammar Gaddafi did. This was according to Medvedev an essential difference. Medvedev also argued for the

importance of continuing diplomatic efforts to make sure al-Assad solved the situation in Syria in order for Syria to develop its own state in the best manner. His claim that the obligation held in international society to protect the civilians from suffering cannot be reached, underpins the pluralist approach to international society.

It was not before 4 October the UN Council formally met to discuss the Syrian crisis. At the meeting, France, Germany, the UK and Portugal proposed a draft resolution, which strongly condemned “the continued grave and systematic human rights violations and the use of force against civilians by the Syrian authorities” (UN Security Council 2011c). The draft was vetoed by Russia and China. Churkin argued that the veto “reflects not so much a question of acceptability of wording as a conflict of political approaches” because

at the heart of the Russian and Chinese draft was the logic of respect for the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria as well as the principle of non-intervention, including military, in its affairs; the principle of the unity of the Syrian people; refraining from confrontation; and inviting all to an even-handed and comprehensive dialogue aimed at achieving civil peace and national agreement by reforming the socio-economic and political life of the country (UN Security Council 2011b).

Military intervention was therefore considered illegitimate. Churkin stressed the need to continue diplomatic efforts and to step back and let the Syrian people decide the future for themselves. Churkin’s arguments defend the pluralist position, because the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity of Syria and the principle of non-intervention outweigh the obligation to intervene in order to prevent atrocities committed by the Syrian regime against the population.

Churkin expressed his concern over statements made in the Security Council that “compliance with Security Council resolutions on Libya in the NATO interpretation is a model for the future actions of NATO in implementing the responsibility to protect” (Ibid.), thereby criticizing the emerging norm of R2P adopted in 2005 and disapproving its application in Syria. Churkin also opposed any

condemnation of the Syrian regime since “the continuation of this tragedy cannot be blamed only on the harsh actions of the authorities” (Ibid.). Russia would not, he argued, “get involved with legitimizing previously adopted unilateral sanctions or attempts at violent regime change” (Ibid.), but was “prepared to develop a genuinely collective and constructive position for the international community” (Ibid.). Churkin was opposed to the idea of having a responsibility to protect presented by other UN Council members, because the Syrian authorities were not the only ones committing violence. Efforts at regime change were considered illegitimate because parts of the opposition groups were also responsible for the bloodshed. Churkin was clear in his critique of the previous NATO led interventions, which were based on a unilateral approach without consensus within the international community. Churkin clearly favored the consensus-based approach by the international community before taking any steps towards intervention, especially unilaterally, thereby favoring the pluralist position. State needs outweighed human needs.

Further, he hinted that Western states had other agendas in Libya, suggesting that “a number of States represented at this table had warmer relations with the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya”,³⁹ and that this should not be the basis for intervention (Ibid.). Here, Churkin suggested that other than purely idealistic concerns drove the military intervention in Libya. His criticism of the intervention in Libya suggests that he did not trust the NATO countries’ true intentions. The pursuit of strategic or geopolitical agendas without being truthful about them, he alleged, was illegitimate. States should not pursue their own interests, he contended, while hiding behind rhetoric of humanitarian concern. Churkin’s claim underpins the pluralist position, since unauthorized military interventions are argued to be driven by other than humanitarian motivations, and that unilateral interventions threaten order in international society.

In a statement by Lavrov, he again insisted that “the situation is not a threat to international peace and security”⁴⁰ and that “intervening in the internal relations of

³⁹ The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya is the full name of the state of Libya.

⁴⁰ «...положение там не угрожает международному миру и безопасности».

Syria could create serious consequences for the entire Middle East” (Lavrov 2011a).⁴¹ Again, Lavrov pointed to the possible consequences of a military intervention in Syria, arguing that an intervention could do more harm than good and could cause great instability in the entire region. This indicates a pluralist approach, because the stability in the international society is more important than humanitarian protection.

On 4 February 2012 a second draft resolution was proposed, this time supported by 13 of the Security Council members. Again, the proposed resolution condemned the widespread and gross violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms by the Syrian authorities (UN Security Council 2012c). Russia and China again vetoed it. Churkin stressed the need to continue efforts to negotiate with President al-Assad. He argued that some members of the international community have undermined the “possibility of a political settlement, calling for regime change, encouraging the opposition towards power, indulging in provocation and nurturing the armed struggle” (UN Security Council 2012a). Churkin implied that continuing negotiations with the leadership and letting Syrians themselves decide their own future is what will uphold stability in the system, not supporting one side of the conflict. At the core of the arguments expressed by Churkin is the pluralist position, because they affirm that policies aimed at dictating the political outcome and regime change threatens international order since it implies that some states are morally above other states in the international society. In addition, they hold that siding with one side of the conflict is dangerous, possibly leading to more instability and unpredictability.

A response to the Russian and Chinese second veto was the creation of “Friends of Syria”, a group consisting of a great number of states and bodies discussing the Syrian crisis outside the UN framework. The group was quickly criticized by Russia’s Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov, claiming that it violated international law. He saw the group as having the same agenda as “Friends of Libya”, the group through which the NATO operations in Libya were executed (Valdai Club 2012). Bogdanov argued that he believed “that the establishment of such self-organized

⁴¹ «...если мы вмешаемся во внутренние дела Сирии, могут появиться весьма серьезные последствия для Ближнего Востока».

groups violates international law and the UN Charter, especially, since they are established for the purpose of intervention, including military intervention” (as cited by Valdai Club 2012). Essentially, this defends the pluralist approach, since any action made outside the UN framework would threaten international stability. His argument supports the position that states cannot act unilaterally, because that will mean that some states undermine state sovereignty, thus creating uncertainty in the international society.

Russian authorities made it clear that the lessons from the intervention in Libya, including the ousting of an authoritarian leader, would not be supported by Russia. In Libya, Lavrov argued, the NATO countries had far exceeded the expressed goals of the resolution (Lavrov 2011a).⁴² According to him, the resolution that was passed on Libya “was made in a rush” without any concrete limits to the use of force (Lavrov 2012a).⁴³ Therefore, Russia would “not allow the Libyan experience to be reproduced in Syria” (Lavrov 2011b).⁴⁴ The support of such policies and resolutions proposed in Syria would lead to the UN supporting one side of the conflict (Lavrov 2011a).⁴⁵ He also pointed to the Western approach to the Arab Spring in general, and that Russia was deeply opposed to it. Russia was “in principle against interference in the internal affairs and imposing ‘foreign receipts’ and external scenarios” (Lavrov 2011b).⁴⁶ Lavrov here firmly supported the pluralist position. The critique of the Libyan experience underpins the idea that no state has the right to decide what government is best in another country. That the Libya intervention was made in a rush also highlights the potential danger of supporting one side of the conflict without a thorough assessment of what the consequences of such action may be. In Lavrov’s view, rushing a resolution through the UN Council would not guarantee a peaceful and stable development in Syria, and could threaten stability in the Middle East.

⁴² «Это выходит далеко за пределы заявленных целей и задач резолюции».

⁴³ «Напомню, что спешка была допущена и с принятием резолюции Совбеза 1973 по Ливии».

⁴⁴ «...путь, ведущий к повторению ливийского сценария, а ни мы, ни данный регион не можем снова допустить такого развития событий».

⁴⁵ «СБ ООН предлагают вступить в гражданскую войну на одной из сторон конфликта».

⁴⁶ «Поэтому принципиально выступаем против вмешательства во внутренние дела, навязывания извне готовых рецептов и сценариев развития».

Referring to the Arab Spring more generally, Lavrov apparently aimed at demonstrating that the Western support in the Arab Spring had proved to be a failed model for change in foreign states, and had produced more instability than the contrary. The only legitimate development, according to the pluralist view, is one which takes place within a state without the outside interference from the international society. A potential intervention is only legitimate with a UN Security Council authorization. Lavrov therefore alleged that the intent of the Western countries to interfere in the internal matters of the Middle Eastern and North African states was illegitimate.

According to Lavrov, Western states are unfortunately “seeking the departure of Bashar al-Assad” (RIA Novosti 2012). He denied that Russia was “clinging to any individual leaders in Syria” (Ibid.). Moscow’s approach to Syria, he affirmed, was avoiding support for one of the sides in the conflict, and that the Syrian crisis had to be solved by the Syrian population itself. The right of self-determination by the different parts of the Syrian conflict, he said, was outlaid in the agreements in the Geneva Convention (Lavrov 2012b).⁴⁷ “The fate of al-Assad would have to be decided by the Syrian people and not by foreign governments or parts of Syrian opposition groups. Therefore Russia has not been trying to convince the president to step down from power, as some has recommended us to do” (Ibid.).⁴⁸ Lavrov’s stance again reaffirms the pluralist approach that states must respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states. This implies that the legitimacy of the leadership should be respected as a principle, and that the entire population must be taken into account when supporting calls for change in a state, not only parts of it.

At a meeting with the leaders of the G-20 countries, President Putin made it clear that no state has the right to decide “who should be brought to power and who should be ousted” (Putin 2012a). In an interview, Putin further expressed his critical

⁴⁷ «В Москве убеждены, что мировое сообщество должно на практике реанимировать Женевские соглашения, содержащие условия, которые позволят сторонам сирийского конфликта решить свое будущее без постороннего вмешательства».

⁴⁸ «Судьба Асада должна решаться сирийским народом, а не иностранными государствами и не отдельными группами сирийской оппозиции (...). Поэтому Россия не пыталась, как некоторые ей советовали, убедить президента оставить власть».

view of acting outside the UN framework, arguing that the actions of Western states in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya had all but created chaos (Putin 2012b). If the UN Security Council supports the decision of only one of the sides of its members, he argued, “its function would in this case cease to exist”.⁴⁹ Speaking of Syria, he argued in general terms that if states perceive it as their right to intervene and “make the rules” without agreement from the other members of the international community, this would only create instability and unpredictability in the international society. To him, this development was dangerous, considering the negative consequences after Western states unilaterally had pursued their own interests in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya (Ibid.). Putin’s arguments indicate skepticism towards Western unilateralism in the post-Cold War era, and they criticize the current world order for being biased towards Western interests. The function of the UN Security Council, he suggested, is to facilitate a multilateral approach to threats to international peace and security. The failure to abide by this arrangement leads to instability and unpredictability. His arguments strongly reaffirm the pluralist approach, demanding that the institutional setting of the UN Security Council must be respected in order to uphold order in international society.

In a speech in the UN Security Council, Lavrov addressed the situation in the Middle East, and spoke of how the international community should handle it. Again, he opposed the ideas of

making hasty demands for regime change, imposing unilateral sanctions designed to trigger economic difficulties and social tensions in the country, inducing the opposition to continue its confrontation with authorities instead of promoting dialogue, making calls to support armed confrontation, and even to foreign military intervention — all of the above are risky recipes of “geopolitical engineering” that can only result in the spread of conflict and escalation of confrontation within the region (Lavrov 2012c).

⁴⁹ «Если бы Организация Объединенных Наций, Совет Безопасности превратились в контору, которая бы штамповала решения одной из заинтересованных сторон, вот в этом случае она прекратила бы свое существование».

Here, Lavrov repeated previous arguments encouraging the international community to carefully consider its approach to Syria, deeming calls to military intervention inappropriate as a means to solve the conflicts. An intervention would only result in the spread of the conflict and escalate to the entire region, he repeated, thereby undermining the pluralist position with its focus on non-intervention and state sovereignty. He also highlighted the potential danger of having states pursuing their geopolitical interests in the international society, thereby not respecting other states' right to exist freely from intervention by other states.

Lavrov also claimed that it was Russia's

absolute priority and sincere wish (...) to immediately put an end to any violence and provide humanitarian assistance to the civilian population, then at this stage we should not talk about who was the first to start, but rather discuss realistic and feasible approaches which would allow to achieve the cease-fire as a priority (Lavrov 2012c).

Lavrov here seemed more concerned with providing assistance to the civilian population, but stressed that such actions must be facilitated through diplomatic negotiations. Importantly, he argued that the international society must be free of normative bias, and must refrain from taking sides in the conflict. The preferred approach was based on a consensual model, founded on a pragmatic assessment of what is really taking place on the ground. Thus, even though he seemed more willing to accept the need to provide assistance to civilians in the conflict, he saw states as the ultimate members of international society and avoided holding moral state conduct over state sovereignty.

Following a third draft resolution on 19 July 2012 supported by a number of UN Security Council members, Russia and China again used their veto power to block it. The draft resolution repeated the previous condemnation of the Syrian authorities in their use of violence against the population. Churkin claimed that that the voting "should not have taken place at all" (UN Security Council 2012b). He refused to endorse any document "that would open the way for the pressure of sanctions and later

for external military involvement in Syrian domestic affairs” (Ibid.). He also criticized Western members for refusing “to exclude military intervention” even though they “denied such intentions” (Ibid.). Such calculations “to use the Security Council of the United Nations to further their plans of imposing their own designs on sovereign states will not prevail”, he continued (Ibid.). According to him, intervention from the outside was only aimed at “pushing their own geopolitical intentions, which have nothing in common with the legitimate interests of the Syrian people” (Ibid.).

Churkin here suggested that the other UN Security Council members neglected Russia’s stance on Syria, and that Russia undoubtedly would deny actions aiming at dictating the situation in Syria, possibly opening up for the possibility of military intervention. Churkin repeated the calls to the other members to refrain from aiming at pushing through a military intervention, though not expressing it openly. Churkin insisted that the ultimate agenda of a military intervention was not to pursue pure idealistic motivations, but to pursue a Western geopolitical agenda in the region. Since this policy ultimately would not be shared by Russia or the Syrian people, the stability of the international society would be jeopardized. The enforcement of a Western agenda on Syria was thus perceived as illegitimate. The justifications by Churkin clearly affirm a pluralist position.

4.2 Part two: comparing and discussing the results

The results of the analysis uncovered both similarities and contradictions when justifying their stance on the legitimacy of military intervention in Georgia and Syria. In many aspects, they insisted on the maintenance of pluralist principles of international society, rejecting the expansion of Western norms regarding humanitarian protection. This regarded both cases. At the same time, and particularly in Georgia, Russian authorities were more concerned with solidarist norms regarding the protection of human rights at the expense of the strict, pluralist state sovereignty understanding. Particularly two aspects stand out in the justifications of the Russian authorities: the conditions under which states may legitimately intervene and infringe state sovereignty and non-intervention to pursue the moral obligation of preventing

gross human right violations, and skepticism towards the perceived illegitimate use of humanitarian norms by the West, especially the US, fearing that their real agenda was to expand their influence in the world. These two aspects will be discussed in detail in the following subsections.

4.2.1 State sovereignty vs. humanitarian concerns

Initially, and on several other occasions, Russian authorities presented the situation in Georgia as an attack on Russian peacekeepers, and that this constituted a violation of Russia's sovereignty. In itself, this legitimized a military response in the eyes of the Russian leaders based on the Westphalian, pluralist model, where each state has the right to defend itself from an outside attack. Even though Russian forces went deep into Georgian territory, the self-defense argument was presented as a pre-emptive act to resist Georgian aggression in the future. However, this argument was mixed with an obvious focus on humanitarian concerns. Russian authorities repeatedly referred to the *individuals* as if they were the ultimate subjects of international law, in line with the solidarist justifications promoted by Western states in previous military interventions. In other words, they held saving human beings in suffering over the principle of state sovereignty and non-intervention. Russia was presented as having a moral duty to protect the Ossetians, the Abkhazians and the Russian peacekeepers. As a result, the sovereignty of Georgia could legitimately be disregarded since Russia had a moral obligation to protect the peoples the Georgian leadership had committed atrocities against. Thus, they mixed pluralist and solidarist ideas when justifying their stance in Georgia, focusing on both each state's right to protect itself from outside aggression, and on the obligation to prevent human suffering.

In contrast, a military interference in the internal affairs of Syria was considered legitimate only if authorized by the permanent members of the UN Security Council. The justifications presented by the Russian leaders indicated no willingness to share some level of solidarity and common norms and values, as the Russian leaders did not agree with the Western leaders about the collective duty to interfere using force. Russian authorities seemed to be especially occupied with upholding international law,

not letting solidarist trends undermine it. This would, in their perception, weaken international order, and even damage the foundation that the UN is built upon. The international community, they insisted, should not move beyond diplomatic means to facilitate a dialogue between the Syrian authorities and the opposition in their approach to the Syrian crisis. They argued that it was up to the Syrian state to resolve its own problems, and to decide on a leader that represented the entire population. Russia, it was argued, had strictly abided by the main institutional framework of international law from the outset of the conflict, and would continue to do so. The fact that Russian authorities rejected that the situation in Syria was a threat to peace and security, reflected their perception that the UN did not have a moral obligation to intervene in the conflict.

In comparison to the Georgian case, where the Russian leaders insisted that something had to be done in order to prevent a humanitarian emergency, the real threat in the Syrian case was argued to be an outside interference by other states. This indicates a contradiction in the justifications on military intervention in the two cases. The Russian leaders went further than the “thin” pluralist international society in justifying the intervention in Georgia. Medvedev insisted that even sovereign states must answer for their actions, and that sovereign states cannot do as they wish. In prolongation of this argument, Russian leaders continuously aimed at delegitimizing the Georgian leadership, rejecting its ability to act as a responsible member of the international society. President Saakashvili and the Georgian leadership were blamed for violating their obligation to protect their own population, and Russia was forced to take military action to uphold the humanitarian responsibility. As a result of the allegations against the Georgian leadership, Russian authorities were not principally against the idea of Saakashvili stepping down from power, as Churkin argued when he suggested that sometimes democratically elected leaders “must go”. Russian authorities thereby actively applied the R2P claim when insisting on their responsibility to protect Russian citizens and civilians living primarily in South Ossetia and Abkhazia since this had been neglected by Georgian authorities. This underpins solidarist ideas and contradicts the pluralist international society, where the

shared agreements between states are limited to the respect for state sovereignty and territorial integrity. The claim that genocide was taking place only reaffirmed the responsibility to protect the civilians, and to “coerce” Georgia to peace. The purpose of these claims was arguably to strengthen Russia’s case for intervention, insisting on its moral obligation.

According to Linklater (2011: 9-10), the solidarist position holds that if sovereignty is violated in the process of saving human beings from suffering, it is because world order has precedence over international order. Using this approach, the Russian authorities clearly prioritized the individuals living in Georgia over the territorial integrity of the Georgian state, which indicates support of a “thicker” version of international society. This is because the Russian authorities defended the notion that individuals have the right not to be subjected to crimes against humanity, and that military intervention is legitimate to protect them. In contrast to the Syrian case, the Russian authorities held the leadership of the Georgian state accountable for not providing security for its peoples. Russian authorities did not consider a UN mandate an absolute necessity to grant an intervention, since they perceived it as a moral right to take matters in their own hands in order to protect civilians. The use of force to protect civilians was not considered disruptive to order since it was morally necessary.

In Syria, however, the R2P was used as an argument against intervention. Russian authorities insisted that the Syrian government had not violated its responsibility, as the responsibility lay within the sovereign state of Syria. The Russian leaders claimed that the responsibility to prevent human suffering could therefore not be transferred to the international society, insisting that the oppositional groups also had to take the blame for the bloodshed. The conflict was presented as an internal struggle that needed to be solved by launching reforms, reconciling with the opposition, restoring civil accord, and starting to develop a modern state. This stance was arguably more in tune with the overall concern by the Russian authorities, considering that officially they consider it

unacceptable that military interventions and other forms of interference from without which undermine the foundations of international law based on the principle of sovereign equality of states, be carried out on the pretext of implementing the concept of "responsibility to protect" (The Foreign Policy Concepts of the Russian Federation 2013).

The use of R2P in Georgia suggests a contradiction in comparison to the Syrian case. The use of solidarist justifications in Georgia poses the question of how committed the Russian leaders were to the solidarist approach and to the R2P. The Russian leaders contradicted themselves when rejecting the solidarist focus on humanitarian norms in Syria, while insisting on their relevance in Georgia. The question is whether the approach taken in Georgia indicates a willingness to “thicken” international society, to strengthen its own security or if it simply reflects realist thinking in the sense of countering Western policies of influencing Russia’s “near abroad”.

In some respects, the justifications in the Georgian case represented a departure from the “thin” pluralist version of international society. They insisted that the R2P criteria were fulfilled by arguing against the legitimacy of President Saakashvili for violating humanitarian law when he attacked his own population, and that he must be held accountable, deeming a military intervention morally necessary. To a certain extent, this corresponds to the ultimate objective of the R2P concept in that the failure of a state to protect its own peoples can strip the state of its sovereignty. The Russian claim was that the intervention was absolutely necessary as a result of the genocide that was claimed to take place, or that could take place. In contrast to the Syrian case, where regime change was out of the question, Russian authorities attached moral state conduct to Georgia’s responsibility in international society, which indicates a departure from the Westphalian pluralist approach.

However, the use of humanitarian claims should be considered critically. There are several aspects of the use of the R2P that may contradict indications of “thicker” versions of international society. Firstly, the failure of a state to fulfill its responsibility

does not give any particular other state the right to take matters into its own hands. The responsibility is to be transferred to the international community, preferably to the UN (Weiss 2010: 356).

Secondly, the claim that genocide was taking place was problematic since the EUs fact-finding report eventually reduced the figure of civilian losses to 162 (IIFFM 2009b: 222). The fact that these numbers were exaggerated seems cynical and strategic, especially when the Russian authorities did not seek to gain consensus on this matter in the UN Security Council. This would certainly strengthen the argument of instrumentality and cynicism presented by Allison (2013).

Thirdly, as South Ossetia is not part of Russian territory, a Georgian attack on South Ossetia did not violate *Russia's* sovereignty, as found by EU's fact-finding report International Independent Fact-Finding Mission (IIFFM 2009a: 172). Therefore, Russia did not strictly abide by international law. What is more, the R2P relates to the protection of civilians in general suffering under the atrocities of state authorities, leading to the assistance from the international community to assist that state. The Russian authorities emphasized the responsibility Russia has in protecting its own citizens, even when they are located outside its borders. Evidently, Russian authorities saw a distinction between civilians in general and Russian minorities living in Russia's "near abroad". In contrast, the Syrian case showed that the Russian leadership denied that the international community had an obligation to intervene in order to help the suffering civilian population. The portrayal of Russia as the ultimate guarantor of peace in the Caucasus undeniably clashes with the basic premise of non-interference into domestic affairs, but highlights the perception of having various "poles" in the international system, where Russian authorities feel they have vital interests that are legitimate to protect, as Kurowska (2014: 19) has argued. Seemingly, the Russian authorities considered it legitimate and necessary to intervene when their own citizens were attacked outside its borders.

The difference between Russia's regional and global obligations regarding human rights issues therefore seems to illustrate a perception held by the Russian

authorities that diverges from that of Western states. In the eyes of the Russian leaders, the UN Security Council should not take sides in a conflict and act as a moral judge, as they insisted in the Syrian case. What the Russian leadership promoted seems more to be the legitimate right of a state to intervene where its own citizens are under threat. A vital difference between the two cases thus appear to be that in Georgia, Russian authorities regarded the protection of Russian citizens close to Russian borders as a legitimate policy, while in Syria, it was essential for the UN Security Council members to uphold international law, since Western countries, nor Russia, had any legitimate moral reason to intervene in the conflict. This contradiction is expressed in Russia's Foreign Policy Concepts, claiming that the main long-term directions of state policy in the sphere of state and public security must be "ensuring comprehensive protection of rights and legitimate interests of Russian citizens and compatriots residing abroad, and promoting, in various international formats, Russia's approach to human rights issues" (The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation 2013). The protection of Russian citizens was an important priority in the Georgian case. The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation also clearly expresses the need to protect Russia's citizens. If Russian citizens abroad are seen as threatened,

*the Russian Federation considers it legitimate to utilize the Armed Forces and other troops in order to (...) ensure the protection of its citizens located beyond the borders of the Russian Federation in accordance with generally recognized principles and norms of international law and international treaties of the Russian Federation*⁵⁰ (the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation 2010).

The Western interpretation of the R2P, supporting the collective moral obligation of protecting civilians at large anywhere in the world, seems not to be strongly supported by the Russian authorities. This discrepancy was certainly evident in Lavarv's claim that the application of the responsibility to protect was absolutely unavoidable and legitimate to protect Russian citizens, yet criticized its wide

⁵⁰ «Российская Федерация считает правомерным применение Вооруженных Сил и других войск (...) для обеспечения защиты своих граждан, находящихся за пределами Российской Федерации, в соответствии с общепризнанными принципами и нормами международного права и международными договорами Российской Федерации».

application in “Africa or in any remote part of other regions” (Lavrov 2008b). This would suggest that the shared values and norms between Russia and Western states over the legitimate use of force are quite limited. When considering the humanitarian arguments used to justify military intervention in Georgia from a Western perspective, they seem to support Allison’s (2013: 166-167) point that to a certain extent, the use of humanitarian claims appeared self-serving, and did not reflect a deep concern with violations of human rights in general. From this perspective, the justifications for intervention in Georgia illustrate the willingness by the Russian leaders to come up with their own interpretations of humanitarian intervention and responsibility to protect, and to take international law in their own hands in order to pursue their own interests. Indeed, as Bellamy (2010: 150) concludes, the R2P criteria were not fulfilled in Russia’s operations in Georgia, which would have justified an intervention based on international law. Given the rejection of the humanitarian doctrine in Syria, this seems apparent. In that sense, the R2P could partially be considered an instrumental claim, and certainly a contradictory one, to justify intervention. This would obviously mean that the Russian authorities do not seem to fully embrace the idea that the major powers of international society have a shared responsibility to prevent human suffering in general in sovereign states, which would justify a military intervention.

One could still argue that the justifications by the Russian authorities suggest that they are concerned with the humanitarian doctrine, albeit restricted to Russia’s regional “pole”. It might be the case that the solidarist ideal type fails to capture an ethnic/regional aspect, which would imply that the justifications are not as inconsistent as they might appear. As Coppiters (2012: 691) points out, in the eyes of the Russian authorities, the Georgian military operation reflected “a continuation of a long history of oppression by Tbilisi of its Ossetian and Abkhaz minorities”. To that end, “the destabilization of the North Caucasus would have detrimental consequences for human rights” (Ibid.). As the Western leaders had previously done in Kosovo, the Russian leaders recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and the right of self-determination of its inhabitants following the intervention. Finnemore (2000: 10) has claimed that “humanitarian interventions are often done, in part, to promote self-

determination of perceived victims”. The use of justifications similar to Western justifications for intervention in the Kosovo case, with the subsequent recognition of independence as a “last resort” to prevent further aggressive policies from the state, does suggest real humanitarian concerns on the Russian part. This was the same solidarist position that Western states had supported.

Seemingly, such justifications were not purely instrumental, as realists would argue. By claiming that Russia did not have any perception of moral responsibility to protect human rights, one ignores the possibility that the justifications of Russian authorities corresponded with their actions. As this thesis assumes, the ideas that led Russian authorities to intervene must be considered seriously. But the apparent contradiction between the cases seems to suggest that the “thicker” versions of international society were mostly restricted to the regional “pole”. In other words, that the Russian authorities seemingly support the idea that the strong state has an obligation to protect its own citizens when under threat. Such a view on international society strengthens the observation by Sakwa (2013: 214) that Russian authorities ultimately seek an international society based on how it had developed in the post-war years, where the US and the Soviet Union were both granted their own “spheres of influence”. This is seemingly especially the case when the norms regulating the use of force are unclear and open to abuse, as the Western-led interventions have illustrated (Weiss 2010: 354). Russian leaders repeatedly insisted that they only had real humanitarian concerns when intervening in Georgia, while insisting that Western states were again misusing solidarist norms to pursue geopolitical objectives in Syria. Clearly, Russia had obvious geopolitical interests in maintaining a dominant position over Georgia and other post-Soviet states, but these interests originate, at least partly, in a feeling of insecurity along Russian borders, and of being encircled by the West.

4.2.2 Resistance to Western domination

The critique of the dominating role of Western states, especially the US, and their lack of respect for fundamental norms and agreements in international society was a key focus for the Russian authorities in the justifications in both cases.

Essentially, Russian leaders expressed suspicion towards the true intentions of Western states when engaging in military intervention and the use of humanitarian arguments to undermine basic pluralist principles. The arguments used to justify military intervention in Kosovo and subsequently to support its secession were pointed to in order to justify Russian policy in Georgia. This may be understood as an attempt to attach the Russian operations to solidarist norm developments in international society, and to portray the intervention as legitimate in accordance with generally accepted normative developments. Clearly, the Russian criticism of Western double standard in their approach to the humanitarian doctrine cut both ways, since the justifications for intervention and recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia was similar to the ones used by Western leaders in Kosovo.

One of the main concerns in the Syrian case for the Russian leaders was the willingness by Western powers to act outside the UN framework. Russian authorities denied the legitimacy of such actions. It was therefore vital to resist on principle any unilateral or non-consensual intervention that Russia did not agree to. Key to this approach was the discourse of multipolarity. As Churkin argued, the disagreement over the crisis in Syria represented a conflict of political approaches, which underpins this insistence on multipolarity in international society. The danger and illegitimacy of Western interventions in previous instances were repeatedly used as examples to illustrate the negative consequences unilateral action could result in. The intervention in Libya, for instance, had according to the Russian leaders shown that when certain states take it in their own hands to act beyond the UN mandate, it not only damages the responsibility of the UN to deal collectively and multilaterally with threats to peace and security, but it also leads to chaos.

The intervention in Libya clearly had an important effect on Russia's stance in Syria. This point has also been made by Trenin (2013: 6), who argues that the NATO-led intervention in Libya and the subsequent removal of Gaddafi damaged Western credibility in the minds of the Russian authorities. It showed that the West did not see Russia as an equal partner, and failed to respect its views and interests. The Libyan experience, he claims, reinforced Russia's general skepticism towards letting Western

states threaten order and undermine Russia as a great power. Russia's stance seems to have led to what Weinert (2011: 28) calls 'buyer's remorse'; when states endorse interventions that stimulate regret. To the Russian leaders, the use of R2P in Libya had apparently illustrated that the true intent of the Western states was not to protect civilians, but ultimately to remove Gaddafi from power. In Syria, they repeatedly criticized the alleged abuse of the R2P by Western states. As Russian authorities saw it, the proliferation of the use of the R2P over basic agreements such as the principle of non-intervention threatened order in international society, and was misused by Western states for geopolitical or other strategic objectives. The proposal to establish the 'Friends of Syria' group was for instance regarded as threatening since it could again potentially lead to a Western-led intervention executed without authorization by the Security Council. This would have lacked the consent of Russia, and would be perceived as a violation of the "thin" pluralist version of international society and the model of multipolarity. In Syria, it was not the conflict itself that was argued to be the greatest threat, but the possibility that Western states could execute an intervention unilaterally. This stance was in accordance with Russia's official foreign policy concepts:

[A] risk to world peace and stability is presented by attempts to manage crises through unilateral sanctions and other coercive measures, including armed aggression, outside the framework of the UN Security Council. There are instances of blatant neglect of fundamental principles of international law, such as the non-use of force, and of the prerogatives of the UN Security Council when arbitrary interpretation of its resolutions is allowed (The Foreign Policy Concepts of the Russian Federation 2013).

Seemingly, the conclusions drawn from the Libyan experience by the Russian leadership affected its foreign policy concepts, and reinforced Russia's position in Syria. In the Georgian case, Kosovo was used as a point of reference. However, the West was blamed for its double standards when not accepting Russian claims that were similar to the justifications presented during the intervention in Kosovo. Arguably, what the Russian authorities feared was a development where Western

states could unilaterally decide how the norms of international society should evolve regarding military interventions. The Russian leaders clearly argued that should the UN Security Council endorse the unilateral policy promoted by Western states, the current system of international order would be threatened. As a result, the justifications in Syria suggest that it was important to prevent solidarist norms to expand in international society, to insist that states remain the principle bearers of rights and duties in international law, while individuals only have the rights that are given to them by the states.

An illustration of this is that it seemed important for Putin to distance Russian acts in Georgia from the Western style of military intervention by denying that Russia had conducted a military intervention at all. His critique of how especially the US uses double standards when intervening in some conflicts suggests that he wished to present Russia as a responsible, non-aggressive state that only pursues its legitimate interests, in contrast to the US, which seeks to impose its values within international society without consulting with other powers such as Russia. In Syria, Putin particularly emphasized how Western states aimed at unilaterally enforcing their rules upon others, and that Russia was not treated as an equal partner. In the Georgian case, Putin, as well as other Russian leaders, drew parallels to the humanitarian intervention in Kosovo in an effort to question the normative authority of the West to decide when a humanitarian catastrophe is taking place, and also to insist that Russian authorities should also have the authority to decide what constituted a humanitarian crisis in Georgia. That the Western states had the right to push through their normative agenda and decide when a humanitarian emergency had materialized, which could potentially legitimize a military intervention or regime change, was rejected by Russian leaders in both cases. These arguments illustrated resentment towards the liberal Western model, and were arguably aimed at underpinning the ideological differences between Russia's approach to international society opposed to the American approach.

According to the Russian leaders, the regime change policy was one of the reasons to suspect that the Western style of intervention had other motives than purely idealistic ones. In the Georgian case, the practice of regime change that Western states

allegedly employed in post-Soviet states was viewed as destabilizing and directed at Russia's power and security. Russian leaders expressed skepticism towards what they perceived as Western, especially American, efforts to expand their influence in Georgia, aiming at reshaping the political landscape in a Western direction. Therefore, Russian leaders questioned the legitimacy of the Georgian leadership since it was "a special project of the US", aiming at destabilizing Russia. That the US and NATO had engaged themselves in Georgia prior to the Russian intervention was perceived as a violation of Georgian sovereignty, and as an effort to expand US strategic and geopolitical ambitions. As Tsygankov (2010: 155) notes, the Russian authorities consider the post-Soviet space their legitimate sphere of interest, and if Western states succeed in absorbing this space, Russia's power in the system is reduced. This suggests that the Russian authorities use a pluralist approach to defend themselves against American efforts to influence Russia's "pole". Within this pole, however, Russian domination seems somewhat excused from the basic institutions of state sovereignty and non-intervention.

Similarly, the removal of the regime in Syria from power was considered a threat to international order, and an effort to expand Western interests in the region. UN resolutions that could potentially lead to a regime change were therefore a major concern for the Russian authorities in Syria. The resolutions proposed by Western states were not explicitly aimed at removing al-Assad from power, but condemned the use of force against the civilian population. Russian leaders arguably feared that these resolutions could eventually be used to justify some sort of intervention on Western terms, as had happened in previous instances. This suspicion is epitomized in Russia's foreign policy documents, claiming that

Some concepts that are being implemented are aimed at overthrowing legitimate authorities in sovereign states under the pretext of protecting civilian population (The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation 2013).

This position underpins the fear that Western-based solidarist norms are misused by Western powers, and that military interventions are ultimately aimed at removing authorities and strengthening Western interests. As a consequence of this deep-rooted skepticism, Russian authorities remained reluctant to endorse a military intervention in Syria.

4.3 Summary and conclusions

The analysis uncovered both differences and similarities in the two approaches in terms of solidarist and pluralist versions of international society. The “thin” pluralist version of international society was particularly defended in the Syrian case, where the Russian leadership vigorously insisted on respecting the principles of non-intervention, state sovereignty and territorial integrity over the obligation to collectively deal with gross violations of human rights. Any interference in the internal matters of Syria to protect civilians was argued to threaten international order. Russian leaders regarded the interference in the internal relations of Syria as more dangerous than siding with one part in the conflict because an intervention could spread to the entire Middle East. Resolutions that could open up the possibility of an intervention were therefore vetoed three times by arguing that the situation in Syria was not threatening to international peace and security.

In Georgia, however, the obligation to protect human rights violations over the need to respect state sovereignty was prioritized. The protection of civilians over respecting Georgian sovereignty and territorial integrity was considered “legally, historically and morally legitimate”. The aggression by the Georgian leadership against the peoples of South Ossetia and Abkhazia had, according to the Russian authorities, signaled that the Georgian authorities had neglected their responsibility to protect, thereby giving the Russian state the moral right to take this responsibility in its own hands. The Russian authorities actively applied the R2P, even though this was viewed with skepticism in Syria, as well as in the official foreign policy concepts of the Russian Federation.

The humanitarian claims by the Russian authorities arguably did not indicate a willingness to “thicken” the normative content of international society. Rather, they suggested that Russia’s moral obligation to protect was primarily limited to the responsibility to protect Russian citizens or other perceived victims within the regional post-Soviet “pole”. Superficially, this obligation illustrated a clear contradiction to the Syrian case. However, despite the claim that the humanitarian claims in Georgia were cynically applied to justify Russia’s perceived right to dominate the post-Soviet sphere, these justifications should be taken seriously if one accepts that ideas and perceptions motivate the behavior of the Russian authorities. The need to respond to perceived destabilizing events around Russian borders seemingly trumps the need to respect state sovereignty. This conceived interest that drives Russian authorities to intervene is seemingly motivated by humanitarian concerns, as well as by Russia’s quest for regional order and resistance to Western power projection.

Both cases showed that the current use of humanitarian claims by Western states to intervene in conflicts was viewed with skepticism by the Russian authorities, fearing that Western states take solidarist norms as “hostage” to justify unilateral military intervention to pursuit geopolitical and strategic interests. Russia’s approach to Syria revealed a suspicion to the normative dimension of international society, and Russian leaders sought to limit the rules and principles of international society to its pluralist features. An expansion of international society not only threatened international order, as they saw it, but also undermined Russia’s role as a self-proclaimed great power. To enhance the claim that the Western humanitarian doctrine was destabilizing to international order, Russian leaders in both cases pointed to the Western-led operations in Kosovo, Iraq and Libya to illustrate the failures of previous Western-led humanitarian interventions. As a result, and as the Syrian case illustrated, the Russian authorities denied Western powers, through the Security Council, the right to decide unilaterally what amounts to a humanitarian catastrophe. At the same time, they fired back at Western states in the Georgian case for rejecting Russia’s right to apply humanitarian justifications when intervening in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

The challenges and limitations of the idea analysis must be addressed in light of the empirical findings. In terms of reliability, the same method could have led to other results in other studies because of its interpretive nature. The construction and application of the ideal types, as well data I have collected for analysis, may be questioned. Regarding measurement validity, there is the possibility that the justifications were misinterpreted or over-interpreted since the ideal types were not always apparent in the text. The use of the ideal types is always open to alternative interpretations. Yet, the nature of this method requires interpretation, since the ideas were not meant to be measured and counted.

When considering the ideal types, the solidarist one was favored in the justifications for intervention in Georgia, and the pluralist one for opposing intervention in Syria. This reveals a contradiction in the Russian justifications. Superficially, one could argue that Russian authorities adapt the arguments to justify other objectives than the ones they openly point to, and that the justifications thus are inconsistently applied. This would also imply that such justifications are instrumentally used. However, to a certain extent, the ideal types did not include the ethnic/regional premise that Russian authorities seemingly give much weight in their approach to military intervention, as illustrated in the Georgian case. This premise was not necessarily fully captured in the ideal type scheme, but nevertheless reveals important perceptions that shape Russian approaches to military interventions. That certain ideas somewhat fail to fall within the ideal type scheme is not necessarily a weakness of the analysis, as argued in subsection 2.2.2., but rather highlights an aspect that was important to the Russian authorities, regardless of how illiberal they may seem to the international community, as Kurowska (2014: 3) has argued. As a result, the ideas expressed by Russian authorities should be taken seriously and not simply as a misuse of norms promoted by Western states to justify the use of force. As this thesis assumes, the ideas expressed by state leaders is an important demonstration of perceived interests. The obligation to manage threats to peace and security in the regional “pole”, especially to protect the perceived interests of ethnic Russians, and to resist Western power projection or norm expansion in the same area, is arguably

rooted in a normative understanding that shape Russian perceptions of national interests, and cannot be derived from the static, realist understanding of national interests. The national interests of Russia are better understood as *perceptions* rooted in the current Russian regime, and as largely tied to the political development during the last two decades.

The analysis has left unanswered some aspects that may have influenced the Russian position on military intervention in Georgia and Syria since ideas are not everything. Examples include the development of domestic politics and the material ties between Russia and Syria, and also Russian interests in the Middle East. Despite these shortcomings, based on the methodological choices made in this thesis, the justifications by Russian leaders have provided meaningful insights into Russian approaches to military intervention in the Georgian and Syrian cases, and have illustrated important mechanisms that explain Russia's approaches to military intervention. The thesis focused on the justifications, because norms and ideas matter, firstly, because the ideas referred to in the debates over military intervention relate to fundamental principles of international relations, and secondly, because they shape the normative foundations of political behavior. The mechanisms that were revealed in the justifications presented by the Russian authorities shape Russia's approaches to military interventions, and are likely, at least in the short or medium term, to continue to play an important role in future instances where military intervention is considered either by Russia or by other major powers.

5 Implications

The second research question of the thesis is as follows: *What do the justifications of Russia's stance on military intervention in Georgia and Syria imply for Russia's role in international society?* Given that the ideas expressed in the two cases accurately explain important foreign policy objectives of the Russian authorities and that the analysis is reliable, this has consequences both for how the Russian authorities interpret the international society and the kind of society they prefer, and for Russia's engagement in military interventions in the future. In the preceding chapter I found that the Russian leaders under certain circumstances perceived the solidarist approach as legitimate, and that the resistance to Western domination in international affairs is essential to understand Russian approaches to military intervention. In the following subsections I will briefly discuss the implications of the results.

5.1 Russia's role in international society

Russia's relation to the hegemonic status of Western powers, especially the US, within international society is essential in its approaches to military intervention. As a result of Russia's diminishing great power status after the 1990s, Russia had an active policy of reasserting itself vis-à-vis the West within international society (McFarlane 2002: 59). In order to be granted the role Russia seeks to play, the Russian authorities have been resisting Western-based solidarist expansion because it undermines Russia's role within international society (McFarlane 2006: 56). The insistence on great power status is an important motivation for the preference of maintaining pluralist principles on a global level. This protects Russian claims considering Russia's loss of material and military capabilities in relation to the US after the end of the Cold War. The suspicion towards the perceived true intentions behind Western expansion of solidarist norms in international society is clear: the willingness by the US to unilaterally intervene in other states using humanitarian claims, as well as the promotion of democracy, has created a more unpredictable and biased world order in the eyes of

Russian authorities. Unilateral action outside the UN framework by Western states inflicts Russia with great uncertainty regarding the role it seeks to play in international relations. The persistence on Russia being a responsible power upholding international law and order, contrasts the West as having a chaotic and destructive impact on law and order. When Russian authorities perceive Western powers as trying to bypass the established rules of the international system, this directly threatens Russian claims on a leading place in the system. To secure Russia's great power status, Russian authorities emphasize great power management and focus on Russia's power in the Security Council (Charap 2013: 37).

Dunne (2003: 315-317) has argued that American "exceptionalism" has not only threatened order in international society, but also reduced the prospects for creating a "thicker" international society in the post-Cold War era because it has threatened basic pluralist features such as great power management, agreement over the use of force, and mutual consultation in ordering international politics. These are features that Russian authorities wish to strengthen since they give Russia a more preferred status. The dominating role of the US also challenges the international society approach, since the institutions of great power management and balance of power are given less significance. For Russia's part, this may also lead to a situation where Russian authorities feel that international law to a certain extent can be neglected if they feel threatened by Western power projection. However, Russia, as a growing power, seemingly prioritizes seizing this situation of uncertainty to influence how the great powers relate to human security and interventions by vigorously insisting on its claims, and alternatively seeks greater alignment with other emerging powers such as China to withstand the expansion of the Western liberal model. Using the term by Suzuki (2008: 47-48), Russia, together with emerging powers such as China, are "frustrated great powers", because they perceive that they are not accepted as socially equal to the existing members of international society, and have not been given the same constitutional privileges as other "legitimate great powers". When Western states sought to bypass Russia and China by acting unilaterally in Syria, Russian authorities, together with China, saw it as their responsibility to prevent such

development from taking place, and to create a more inclusive global order that does not force its norms upon other states. The efforts by Russian authorities to balance Western, especially American, power, against Russia's and that of other emerging powers, motivate Russian authorities to press for the multipolar, institutional framework of the UN, creating an international society more multilateral and inclusive of other states' interests.

Russian authorities generally perceive the humanitarian arguments used to justify Western-led interventions as a pretence to remove authoritarian regimes and to promote democracy. As the results of the analysis show, Russian leaders openly fear that humanitarian norms are taken advantage of by Western states to pursue other agendas, such as the regime change policy that the Iraqi and Libyan interventions ended in. With this as the background, it was in the interest of the Russian authorities not to condemn the Syrian regime, and reject the prospects for joining the Western calls for intervention. It strengthens Russian interests to promote the "thin" pluralist version of international society based on an agreement between states on the rules of "co-existence", where the UN Security Council is the only legitimate institution through which the use of force should be sanctioned. Understanding Russia as neo-revisionist within international society, provides an explanation for the defense of the Westphalian model of sovereign equality of states, where Russian authorities aim at enforcing new norms within this system, not just abiding by the norms that are promoted by Western states (Sakwa 2011: 199). This entails seeking to deny Western powers the ability to unilaterally control the normative agenda beyond a "thin" pluralist, Westphalian, international society. For instance, in Syria they resisted efforts by Western powers to decide that the situation amounted to a threat to international peace and security, and in Georgia they demanded that Western states should agree that the situation was in fact a threat to peace and security. These justifications should be understood as efforts to shape the normative development of international society.

However, given Russia's official acceptance of the R2P and its application in the Georgian case, the Russian position may not be an outright rejection of human rights concerns. According to Trenin (2013: 9), Russian authorities formally recognize

the responsibility to protect—“that is, the principle that human rights considerations can make a military intervention by the UN or one of its members necessary”. But the protection of civilians should be confined to protecting civilians, not “changing the regime or helping the armed opposition fighting the regime” (Ibid.). As illustrated in the Georgian case, the intervention, although marching deep into Georgian territories, did not lead to a regime change. Russian leaders suggested that they wished for the departure of Saakashvili, but did not enforce it. Sakwa (2011: 205) argues that Russia’s main critique of the universalistic agenda of human rights and democratic standards promoted by Western states, “is not that they are inappropriate, but that they have been appropriated by the hegemonic powers and applied selectively”. Considering the Russian critique of the West for not accepting the belief held in the Russian elite that Russia is entitled to a zone of exclusive influence in its “near abroad”, Russia feels the international community should accept the legitimacy of these claims. However, the Russian goal of securing this recognition is not accepted by neither the West nor post-Soviet states.

The insistence on a Westphalian model of equal, sovereign states clashes with Russian claims of pursuing humanitarian objectives when intervening in the post-Soviet sphere. Russian authorities apparently consider it legitimate to unilaterally intervene within its own regional “pole” in order to pursue their interests, either humanitarian or security related. An argument used in the Georgian case was that Russia has a historical and moral obligation to protect the peoples of the Caucasus. Zigler (2011: 16) has observed that the Westphalian model of equality that Russia seeks to defend is one where major powers are more equal than small states. Sakwa (2013: 214) has also argued that the international society Russia pursues, is similar to the one developed in the post-war years, where the superpowers were given exclusive privileges in their “zone of influence”. This puts Russia on top of the hierarchy with more rights and obligations within its regional “pole”. Within this model, Western power projection is perceived as an infringement on Russia’s sovereignty and as a threat to Russia’s position and interests. In that sense, Russia’s approach to military

intervention is partly driven by a defensive stance to protect Russian interests, and not primarily to promote Russian values globally.

The move to consider Georgia and Ukraine for NATO and EU membership reinforces the idea that Russian security and interests are under threat, and is challenging to Russia's view of its own sovereignty. Equally challenging to Russia's role in international society is the perceived destabilizing effect of the "colour revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine, which brought pro-Western regimes to power. These were seen as masterminded by the West, in particular the US (Nodia 2012: 722). Kurowska (2014: 4, 19) argues that within its regional "pole", Russian authorities are driven by a deep-rooted motivation to resist Western hegemony, and the obligation to protect Russian citizens derives from this duty Russian leaders bestow upon themselves. Given the fact that the Russian authorities actively applied the R2P in the Georgian case, suggests that the Russian authorities do not reject humanitarian norms, but that they are primarily considered legitimate when justifying the duty to protect Russian citizens outside Russian borders as well as to protect Russian interests.

The current situation in Ukraine illustrates this notion, where arguments used to justify the Russian intervention and subsequent annexation of Crimea included Russia's perceived duty to protect Russian minorities outside Russian borders, and its aim to resist Western power in Russia's "near abroad" (Charap and Darden 2014: 10). The case of Ukraine indicates that Russian authorities have been less willing to justify the intervention according to international law and the right of self-defense as when intervening in Georgia. Justifying Russia's policy in his address to the Federal Assembly on 18 March 2014, Putin pointed to extra-legal arguments, such as references to truth, protection of interests, historical injustice and the will of the people (Putin 2014).⁵¹ In addition, Russian leaders have to a larger degree used the term "compatriots" instead of "Russian citizens", which is "a flexible term enshrined in

⁵¹ "In people's hearts and minds, Crimea has always been an inseparable part of Russia. This firm conviction is based on **truth and justice** (...). This country was going through such hard times then that realistically it was incapable of **protecting its interests**. However, the people could not reconcile themselves to this outrageous **historical injustice**". And when justifying the decision to annex Crimea, he argued: "Now this is a matter for Russia's own political decision, and any decision here can be based only on the **people's will**, because the people is the ultimate source of all authority".

Russian legislation that implies a common fatherland and gives Putin great latitude in determining just whom it includes” (Mankoff: 2014: 60). This certainly illustrates the tension between the kind of society Russian authorities and Western powers seek to promote.

Considering Russia’s wish to reclaim great power status, especially within the post-Soviet sphere, and the perception that Western efforts to expand solidarism is used as an instrument to project power, renders the prospects for Russia to converge with Western approaches to military intervention minimal. Due to the alleged abuse of humanitarian claims in previous interventions by the West, Russian authorities have seemingly developed a deep sense of skepticism towards the real intentions behind humanitarian interventions executed by Western states. Russian authorities seem mostly confined to the protection of Russian citizens, or even the more vague “compatriots”, because Russian authorities see it in their interest to prevent them falling under the influence of Western powers. The Russian authorities are likely to regard the unilateral use of force to protect Russian interests as legitimate if they sense that Western states are trying to expand international society in Russia’s exclusive zone of interest, as the Ukrainian case illustrates. Finding a common approach with the West regarding military intervention seems limited because of their fundamental disagreement over basic principles in the new world order, such as state sovereignty, and over what the moral responsibility of international society should be in cases of gross human rights violations. These attitudes are to a large extent rooted in ideas about Russia’s place in the world and in the region, and are connected with Putin’s active policy of reasserting Russia’s material and normative capabilities. Within that policy, a strong state and respect for sovereignty is necessary to protect Russia from instability and disruptive trends. Russia is therefore likely to remain hesitant to the endorsement of military interventions to protect human rights violations in the future through the UN Security Council.

The rhetoric used by Russian leaders illustrates the principles, norms and values they defend and promote, and helps to understand key aspects and mechanisms that shape Russian foreign policy choices. As a permanent member of the UN Security

Council, Russia plays an essential role how in how the major powers are able to cope with threats to international peace and security and gross violations of human rights. The ideas in the justification presented by Russian authorities deserve further research as they help to better understand Russia's approaches to military intervention.

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